‘The Dusk of the Nations’

Evolution, Degeneration, and Gender in Fin-de-Siècle Literature

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Although I was already slightly obsessed with the Victorian period when I went to Leeds as an exchange student in 2010, I am indebted to Dr Julia Reid at the University of Leeds for making the 1890s seem especially interesting.

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1 Introduction

> There is grandeur in this view of life,
> with its several powers,
> having been originally breathed
> into a few forms or into one; and that,
> whilst this planet has gone cycling on
> according to the fixed laws of gravity,
> from so simple a beginning endless forms
> most beautiful and most wonderful
> have been, and are being, evolved.[1]

The image of the epigraph is of a world full of wonder. In 1859, Charles Darwin presented the evolution of all the different species on Earth as something magnificent. That so much could be seen to have come from something so small, was utterly fascinating to him and many of his contemporaries. As the nineteenth century drew to a close, however, people started to focus more and more on a different – and much less wonderful – aspect of evolution. The idea of degeneration, or regression, was frightening and deeply unsettling to many late Victorians. For some, though, it nevertheless acted as a stimulus or even as a weapon. According to William Greenslade, '[d]egeneration was at the root of what was, in part, an enabling strategy by which the conventional and respectable classes could justify and articulate their hostility to the deviant, the diseased and the subversive.'[2] New theories about heredity and degeneration were used to enforce the status quo. My aim with this thesis is to study how the themes of evolution, biological determinism, and degeneration are treated in Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* (1891), Bram (Abraham) Stoker's *Dracula* (1897), Mona Caird's *The Daughters of Danaus* (1894), and H. G. Wells's *The Time Machine* (1895). I will pay particular attention to a) how the interplay between natural science and religion is presented, b) the different kinds of evolutionary frames that are activated in the texts, and c) which consequences these have for the representation of gender. As Gillian Beer points out in her seminal study *Darwin's Plots* (1983), the formulation of evolutionary theory had direct consequences for how narratives were constructed and for the themes they discussed.[3] My concern is with how this is expressed in novels of the *fin de siècle*.

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[1] Charles Darwin, *On the Origin of Species: The Illustrated Edition*, ed. David Quammen (1859; repr., New York: Sterling, 2008), 513.
[2] William Greenslade, *Degeneration, Culture and the Novel, 1880–1940* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 2.
[3] See for example Gillian Beer, *Darwin's Plots: Evolutionary Narrative in Darwin, George Eliot and Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, 3rd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 198.

1.1 Origins

In order to understand the prevalence of evolutionary themes in Victorian fiction, it is necessary to have some knowledge of the contextual background. During the Enlightenment, thinkers started to question Biblical explanations of natural phenomena. According to the time schemes of the Bible, the Earth must be somewhere between 6 000 and 13 000 years old, depending on how you count. As interest in natural history spread, however, people discovered evidence that cast doubt on the Biblical presentation of the world's origin. Fossils in particular upset several previous theories about the world's history. It had been common to regard the Earth as fixed and all its species as static. When God had created the Earth, he had made everything just as it was supposed to be. When people started to understand what fossils really were, and how they were made, this view of the Creation as complete was destabilised. Not only were fossils immensely old, which conflicted with the Biblical scheme, but they were found in parts of the world which did not match their type, such as marine organisms high up in the hills.[4] If they really had been living there aeons ago, the world must have looked very different – which meant that the Earth had not been the same since Creation; it had changed and was possibly changing still.

Evolution simply did not fit with a literal approach to the Bible. According to this Biblical view of history, humans were just the same when they first were created as they were now. God had put them in charge over the Earth and over all the animals. Instead of seeing humans as stewards or even masters over the Earth, evolutionary theory would make them animals just like any other. Additionally, the very existence of the world and all its beauty seemed to point to its having been made by design. William Paley used the example of a watch and claimed that just as the complexity and beauty of a watch implied a watchmaker, the same characteristics of the natural world implied a creator.[5] Evolution seemed not only to strip the world of a creator; it reimagined the world as a dark and dangerous place where only the most ruthless would be able to survive. Roslynn D. Haynes perfectly describes why the concept of evolution was so unsettling for many:

> There were at least three other aspects [apart from creation/origin] of the evolutionary process which struck deeply at both the Christian concept of a loving God, and the humanist belief in the essential goodness and nobility of man. These were, firstly, the stress on chance variations as the raw material for an arbitrary, non-directional evolutionary process; secondly the inevitably waste thereby involved, since those variations which proved less fitted for survival in the struggle for existence became extinct; and thirdly the consequent pain which must necessarily be suffered by the ill-

[4] Sherrie Lyons, *Evolution: The Basics* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 11.
[5] Beer, *Darwin's Plots*, 77–78.

> adapted. A process involving any, much less all, of those aspects seemed irreconcilable with the character of a Christian God.[6]

People who tried to reconcile evolutionary theory with a belief in a benevolent God were at a loss at how to explain all this suffering. The advent of the so-called 'Higher Criticism,' initiated by Mary Ann Evans's translation into English of David Friedrich Strauss's *Das Leben Jesu* in 1846, and furthered by among others the essay collection *Essays and Reviews* in 1860, had made the Bible open to interpretation just like any other text.[7] If this approach was adopted, how much of the Bible could be trusted in a literal sense?

There had been theories of evolution before Charles Darwin. His grandfather, Erasmus Darwin, for example, published several works in the late eighteenth century that presented his interpretation of the natural world. Charles himself felt pushed to publish *On the Origin of Species* (1859) before he was satisfied it was ready because of Alfred Wallace, who independently had drawn much the same conclusions about evolution and natural selection as Darwin and wanted to publish them. What was special about *The Origin*, however, was that it clearly and thoroughly, in a language people could understand, explained how evolution works. Since evolution had been discussed for some time, it did not take long before it was accepted by many. What was harder to swallow, however, was Darwin's explanation of the mechanism of natural selection.[8] For many, it seemed too random, too unpredictable, and too cruel to be aligned with a view of the world as basically good.

There was initial disagreement as to what characteristics could be transferred by heredity and thus contribute to the evolution of the species. August Weismann suggested the existence of a 'germ plasm,' which carried over more or less undisturbed from generation to generation. According to this theory, it would be impossible to inherit characteristics your parents had acquired during their lifetime, because they would not influence the germ plasm.[9] Jean-Baptiste Lamarck, however, claimed the opposite. According to him, experience could be imprinted on the organism and be transferred to the next generation. This theory became known as 'organic memory' theory. Parts of it were very attractive to social reformists especially, because they here found confirmation that education and charity were worth it – if they could better people's condition in the here and now, future generations would benefit. One consequence of the germ plasm theory was that it made efforts at social reform futile –

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[6] Roslynn D. Haynes, *H. G. Wells: Discoverer of the Future; The Influence of Science on his Thought* (London: The Macmillan Press, 1980), 28.
[7] Gregg A. Hecimovich, *Hardy's 'Tess of the D'Urbervilles'* (London: Continuum, 2010), 13–14.
[8] Lyons, *Evolution*, 3.
[9] Jed Mayer, 'Germinating Memory: Hardy and Evolutionary Biology,' *Victorian Review* 26, no. 1 (2000): 83.

even if you changed the conditions for the poor, the next generations would soon be back in poverty again, due to their inherited 'bad' qualities.[10]

For the first couple of decades after *The Origin* was published, people paid most attention to the progressive aspects of evolution. Other voices were soon heard, however, voices discussing whether evolution always had to work for the better and what it really meant to be adapted to your environment. In 1880, Edwin Ray Lankester reminded the public that 'we are subject to the general laws of evolution, and are as likely to degenerate as progress.'[11] 11 years later, H. G. Wells likewise cautioned that '[t]here is, therefore, no guarantee in scientific knowledge of man's permanence or permanent ascendancy.'[12] From the fossil record, people were aware that whole species had become extinct. Could this happen to humanity? The large amount of people living under terrible conditions in cities such as London and Manchester seemed to point to the possibility of a future nation made up of weak, unhealthy, and 'immoral' individuals.[13] To some, such as the Austrian writer and medical doctor Max Nordau, the aesthetic movement of the 1890s and the French Naturalists were signs of humanity's corruption.[14]

People suggested different ways of preventing degeneration. Nordau, who wrote the book *Degeneration*, published in English in 1895, warned against encouraging the degenerates and being influenced by them. In his view, degenerates were inherently unable to create anything worthwhile; it was therefore highly probable that they would die out on their own account if they were just left alone.[15] Thomas Henry Huxley took inspiration from Lamarck and suggested that humanity should use its intelligence to mould itself into a higher being by keeping itself to a more advanced ethical standard than what was necessary for a basic struggle for existence.[16] For those who kept to the germ plasm view, however, this was not a viable solution. For them, the answer lay in the individual biological make-up. Some started tinkering with ideas about how not only to control populations, but also to create the kind of population that you desired. Darwin's cousin, Francis Galton, coined the word 'eugenics' in 1883 and later explained it as 'the science which deals with all influences that

[10] Angelique Richardson, *Love and Eugenics in the Late Nineteenth Century: Rational Reproduction and the New Woman* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 24.
[11] Edwin Ray Lankester, 'From *Degeneration: A Chapter in Darwinism* (1880),' in *The Fin de Siècle: A Reader in Cultural History, c. 1880–1900*, ed. Sally Ledger and Roger Luckhurst (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 4.
[12] H. G. Wells, 'Zoological Retrogression (1891),' in *The Fin de Siècle*, 12.
[13] Greenslade, *Degeneration*, 48.
[14] Greenslade, *Degeneration*, 121.
[15] Max Nordau, *Degeneration* (1895; repr., Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1993), 16.
[16] T. H. Huxley, 'From *Evolution and Ethics* (1893),' in *The Fin de Siècle*, 239.

improve the inborn qualities of a race; also with those that develop them to the utmost advantage.'[17] Through encouraging the right people to marry and have children and discouraging 'undesirables' from having them, a better 'race' could be manufactured and maintained.[18]

Part of this worrying about the future of humanity was exacerbated by the increasing demand for women's rights. The so-called 'Woman Question' was heavily debated. The growing number of women who were taking up activities traditionally seen as masculine, such as writing, engaging in politics, or even getting an education or a job outside the home, were seen by many as abandoning their duties – their true part in the advancement of the race was to stay at home and raise their children, not taking over men's roles. Science, and evolutionary theory in particular, was used to explain why the Victorian separation of men's work/space and women's work/space was natural and morally right.[19] In her book *In Science's Shadow*, Patricia Murphy studies representations of women and science in late-Victorian literature and especially the ways in which science was used to silence women or to validate current gender norms. While she focuses on texts from the 1870s and 1880s, the topic is still highly relevant in the 1890s, as Murphy recognises in her afterword.[20]

1.2 Evolution in Literature

The importance of evolutionary theory in literature has been increasingly acknowledged in later years. In 1983, Gillian Beer published her *Darwin's Plots: Evolutionary Narrative in Darwin, George Eliot and Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, which became a ground-breaking work in the study of literature and science, particularly for her detailed analysis of Darwin's texts and how they influenced and were influenced by the literature and the literary language of the time. Five years later, George Levine published *Darwin and the Novelists: Patterns of Science in Victorian Fiction*, in which he traced Darwinism in, among others, Dickens and Trollope. Other aspects of the field have also been developed. John Glendening, for example, studies Victorian literature's use of Darwin's 'entangled bank' in *The Evolutionary Imagination in Late-Victorian Novels: An Entangled Bank* (2007). In *Degeneration, Culture*

[17] Francis Galton, 'Eugenics: Its Definition, Scope and Aims (1904),' in *The Fin de Siècle*, 329.
[18] The word 'race' is frequently used in Victorian texts, and the exact meaning changes with the context. Sometimes it refers to humanity, sometimes to people of the same colour, sometimes to people from the same part of the world, sometimes to British people, and sometimes to a group of people who share a common trait not mentioned above. Although I would not normally use 'race' in these circumstances, I will sometimes do so to preserve continuity.
[19] See for example Richardson, *Love and Eugenics*, 68.
[20] Patricia Murphy, *In Science's Shadow: Literary Constructions of Late Victorian Women* (Columbia: The University of Missouri Press, 2006), 215.

and the Novel, 1880–1940 (1994), William Greenslade analyses late-Victorian and Edwardian literature's treatment of degeneration theory, while Angelique Richardson examines the New Women's different approaches to eugenics in *Love and Eugenics in the Late Nineteenth Century: Rational Reproduction and the New Woman* (2003). Some critics, such as Roslynn Haines in *H. G. Wells: Discoverer of the Future; the Influence of Science on his Thought* (1980), choose to focus on one author in particular and analyse their relationship with science. All these works situate themselves within a historical or contextual turn within literary studies. To see either literature and science or literature and 'the real world' as separates is seen as simplistic or reductive. One basic assumption, which the whole of this thesis rests on, is that all literature is written and published in its own, particular cultural climate, and that literature, science, and culture in general can be seen to interact in a myriad of different ways. While it is not so simple as to be purely a question of who influences whom at what point, it is still a question of noticing trends and traces that when taken together with the general context can tell us a little bit more about both the literature *and* the culture *and* the science at the time.

1.3 The Novels

The four novels that I have chosen to study were all published in the 1890s. Some of the same arguments or images appear in several of the books. I have tried to choose novels that are quite different from each other in some aspects, however, as I wanted to see how writers with different agendas or purposes chose to avail themselves of contemporary scientific theories. The novels have all been subject to considerable academic criticism, except perhaps for *The Daughters of Danaus*, which tends to be mentioned only in passing.

Thomas Hardy (1840–1928) published 15 novels and 9 volumes of poetry. Living in London in the 1860s and staying there for the season in later years, he cultivated contacts with many of the leading voices of the day. He followed debates about science and religion, and when asked which thinkers had influenced him the most, the answer was 'Marx, Darwin, Huxley, Spencer, Comte, Hume, Mill.'[21] As an agnostic, Hardy was suspicious of organised religion and the ways in which it tried to control people. He read widely whenever he encountered a topic he was interested in, and we can see signs of this interest in the scientific terminology and imagery in his writing, drawn from fields such as geology, astronomy, and biology.

[21] Hecimovich, *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, 6.

Tess of the D'Urbervilles was originally serialised by *The Graphic* magazine in 1891.[22] A three-volume book edition was published in December the same year; the Penguin edition I will mainly be using is based on this edition. Hardy made several changes to the novel during the following years, however, some of them as late as 1912. When it comes to *Tess*, some of the changes critically influence the reader's impression of key plot points or character traits. In this case, I will therefore also refer to other editions from time to time, especially the 1912 edition.[23]

The plot of *Tess* may seem familiar. A spirited young woman who is poor but honest must seek help for her family from a distant relation who turns out to be a cad (and not a relation at all). But it is what comes after Tess's rape (or 'seduction,' if you go by the later editions) that makes the novel remarkable. Not only does she bear a child out of wedlock without feeling especially shameful, when the child dies, she tries to start over, and it is made clear that it is only because of an unjust society that she is not able to do so. Angel, the middle-class, atheist son of a priest, falls for Tess's beauty, but when he learns of her past (after their wedding), he claims that it is impossible for him to be with her. Through Tess's insisting that she has only ever done what made sense to her at the time and through Angel's eventual voyage of self-realisation, Hardy problematises contemporary notions of autonomy, purity, fate, and heredity. The shadows of Tess's D'Urberville ancestors follow her through the novel, making both her and the reader uncertain about the extent to which she is truly in charge over her destiny.

Bram (Abraham) Stoker (1847–1912) started his professional life in the Irish Civil Service while working as a theatre critic, editor, essayist, and short-story writer on the side. In 1878, he left this job to start working as the Acting Manager of the London Lyceum theatre at the recommendation of the famous actor Henry Irving. Stoker worked together with Irving for 27 years, during which time he also published several novels, stories for children, and travel literature, as well as continuing to write theatrical criticism. His journalistic work naturally kept him updated on the latest trends and debates, while his work at the Lyceum meant that he was in touch with the theatrical world.

When *Dracula* (1897) was first published, it was regarded purely as popular fiction, and most critics did not really ascribe any deeper meanings to it.[24] In fact, it took literary

[22] From now on referred to as *Tess*. The D in D'Urberville is capitalised in the 1891 edition, which is the one I will mainly be using. When critics refer to other editions, I will use their spelling.
[23] Since the changes made to later editions of *Dracula*, *The Daughters of Danaus*, and *The Time Machine* are minimal, however, I will be referring to one edition only when discussing them.
[24] William Hughes, *Bram Stoker's 'Dracula': A Reader's Guide* (London: Continuum, 2009), 8.

critics until the late 1950s before they paid any particular attention to the novel.[25] Instead of discarding it as pulp fiction which tried to be as scary and titillating as possible, critics now began trying to analyse exactly what it is that makes it so frightening. The plot of the novel is more or less straightforward: young lawyer Jonathan Harker travels to Transylvania to meet his client, Count Dracula. Dracula, who turns out to be a vampire, locks Harker up in his castle and travels to London, where he plans to feast on the local populace. The rest of the novel details Harker and his companions' struggles in defeating the vampire.

The narrative structure is not quite so simple, however. The tale is presented as a jumble of diary notes, newspaper cuttings, letters, and telegrams written by a range of different characters – all of the said material is second hand, because according to the text, what we are in fact reading is Mina Harker's typescript of all these documents. Unease about the nature of truth and the reporting of truth can lead the reader to question the point of trying to document anything. In addition to this, critics have explored themes such as heterosexuality, homosexuality, degeneration, anti-Semitism, Orientalism, Imperialism, feminism, misogyny, Catholicism versus Protestantism, technology, and Irish nationalism. Often the discussion has revolved around attempts to pinpoint what it is that Dracula symbolises. From biographical readings of him as Irving or Stoker's father to his being an allegory of capitalism – the suggestions are endless. The ease with which the novel lends itself to interpretation can be seen in the richness of its reception.

Mona Caird (1854–1932) was mostly forgotten during the mid- to late-twentieth century, but especially from the 1990s onwards, feminist scholars have tried to rekindle interest in her work. She was an active feminist who published many essays and several novels, and she was associated with organisations working with causes from antivivisection to women's rights. Her novels emphatically discuss the themes she was passionate about, which may be why they were found dated or irrelevant for so long. *The Daughters of Danaus* follows the main character Hadria's struggle towards becoming a composer. Through Hadria's youth, her ill-conceived marriage to the faux-progressive Temperley, and her escape to Paris to study music, the reader is present at frequent discussions about women, marriage, and motherhood, and how these issues are treated in contemporary society. The hold society has over women is illustrated by Hadria's having to give up her dreams in order to go home and nurse her mother. She becomes everything she had sworn she would never be, because there is no room for her to act differently. If she rebels, her mother dies. Caird highlights the

[25] Hughes, *'Dracula': A Reader's Guide*, 95.

fact that if women are to have any chance at succeeding, society and societal expectations of women need to be fundamentally changed. Referring to evolutionary theory, she stresses the beneficent possibilities in change and variation and encourages her readers to determine where they can take part and how they can help change society.

Herbert George Wells (1866–1946) was yet another prolific writer; he published over 50 novels as well as a large number of works of nonfiction. He is the only one of these four authors who had any formal education in science; he was a keen student of biology and published several essays on zoology. Whereas Caird thought societal improvements could be effected by cultural means, Wells thought biology was the root of the matter. The eugenics that Caird vehemently opposed, because she disliked the implications for the 'unfit,' Wells viewed as necessary for humanity's survival. The possible results of humanity's not taking action, but continuing blithely on its present course, can be seen in the future visited by the Time Traveller in *The Time Machine*. Travelling into the future for the first time, the Time Traveller expects splendour and technological brilliance. Instead, he finds degeneration and brutality. When he returns, none of his listeners really believes his story, and his warnings are mostly in vain. *The Time Machine* is Wells's first novel, and it is only in his later writings that he truly develops his didactic approach to fiction, but the sense of his delivering a message is still present here at the beginning of his career.

1.4 Structure

In the first chapter of the thesis, I focus on the relationship between nature and culture in Hardy's *Tess*, and how this is expressed through the characters and the world in which they live. At the beginning of the chapter, I examine some of the different categorisations of *Tess* that critics have done over the years since the novel was first published. Acknowledging the scientific allusions in *Tess* can influence our whole perception of the novel. Our first impression of what the novel is going to be like can in similar ways decide even what genre we consign it to and consequently what we may register of the novel's imagery, style, and underlying logic. The next part of the chapter discusses some of the scientific imagery in *Tess*, especially related to heredity and degeneration. Whether Tess is doomed to repeat her ancestors' mistakes or is able to take control over her own life is one of the novel's major themes. After this, I look at how different religions are presented. Some faiths or practices are given considerably more narratorial sympathy than others, with the beliefs that are seen as close to nature (Paganism, superstition, pragmatism) at the one end and organised religion at the other. Finally, I examine nature and culture in the novel's gender relations, with Tess and

Angel as representations of each category. Tess is frequently called a daughter of Nature, but what that truly means is incomprehensible to modern, 'civilised' characters such as Angel and Alec who long ago seem to have lost contact with nature.

In the next chapter, I investigate vampires in *Dracula* and what it is that makes them so unsettling. As noted above, some of the novel's success (and the success of its criticism and general reception) must be related to how so many different themes can be read into it, making the vampire an appropriate symbol of almost anything. In the first part of the chapter, I examine the relationship between *Dracula* and degeneration theory. Stoker explicitly refers to this scientific field in the novel, and it is clear that the Count himself is in many ways an example of degenerate humanity. He is not the only one, however, and signs of degeneration hover uneasily over most of the characters in the novel. In the next part, I discuss some of the different worldviews present in *Dracula*. A feeling of uncertainty is left in the reader, because the characters often say one thing while doing another. Van Helsing teaches Dr Seward to be open-minded about esoteric 'sciences,' but is not open-minded enough himself to let a woman take part in the vampire hunting. The question of what a woman is, and what she can do, runs through the novel, and I explore this in the last part of the chapter.

The chapter about *The Daughters of Danaus* begins with an introduction to the 'New Woman' phenomenon of the 1890s. So-called New Women writers wrote what may be termed feminist literature with the explicit intention of changing society. Mona Caird was one of the most vocal of these writers, and *The Daughters of Danaus* is as much a debate in its own right as it is a novel. The next part of the chapter discusses Caird's views of marriage and motherhood compared to other contemporary feminists and to the middle-class norm at the time. Caird was radical in that she did not recognise anything 'holy' in the roles of wife or mother, and she discouraged women from having children they did not really want. Whether nature or society dictates our behaviour is a major theme in this novel, as it is in most of Caird's writings, and she is firmly on the side of society. If the rules we live by are culturally determined, it stands to reason that they can be changed if the culture changes. This is the topic of the last part of the chapter, which discusses Caird's treatment of vivisection. Keeping two arguments running at the same time through the novel, she both compares animals to humans to make us understand that we should treat animals as we would humans and stresses the difference between animals and women so that we should realise how wrong it is to treat women as animals.

The last chapter is a shorter chapter about a very short novel – *The Time Machine*. I wanted to include this book, because it does, in several ways, take evolution and degeneration

to their extreme. I do not, however, think it demands as much space as the other novels. The first part of the chapter is about determinism and Wells's intentions in writing the novel. By presenting future worlds ruled by degeneration and entropy, he both hoped to call readers into action in order to avoid the avoidable parts of this future and to shock believers in inevitable progress out of their contentment. In the next part of the chapter, I discuss the Eloi and the Time Traveller's relationship with Weena. The Eloi are described as feminine, and in this novel, that equals degeneration. Characteristics that the Time Traveller think of as manly, such as intelligence, courage, or invention, have been left behind. Finally, I examine the Morlocks and the Time Traveller's reaction to them. While wanting to feel related to the Eloi, because they are friendly and pleasant, his actions reveal his closer likeness to the Morlocks.

I have chosen to write one chapter about each novel instead of organising the thesis thematically, because I think this does the most justice to the individual literary works. Each chapter is thus largely self-contained. I do, however, use the conclusion to briefly sum up my analysis and point out a few common trends. There are certain recurring images, such as the consumption of meat/blood and the sleeping woman, that I also discuss there.

2 'How Are the Mighty Fallen': Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*

How arrives it joy lies slain,
And why unblooms the best hope ever sown?
– Crass Casualty obstructs the sun and rain,
And dicing Time for gladness casts a moan….
These purblind Doomsters had as readily strown
Blisses about my pilgrimage as pain.[1]

The relationship between nature and culture plays a large part of Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*. Using contemporary theories from the fields of biology and geology especially, Hardy presents a textual world where the everyday lives of the characters, with all their drama and emotion, are always contrasted with the endlessness of time and space. This world, with all that is in it, is understood as being a product of nature, and one tragedy of modern life is seen to be the fact that many humans have estranged themselves from nature to the degree that they do not really understand what it is or how it operates any longer. Issues concerning gender, social standing, fate, and religion are all seen to be influenced by this estrangement, and Hardy's characteristic style, with its mix of Latin, scientific jargon, and rural dialects, interrupts the flow of the reading to the point where the reader also feels estranged from the world of the novel.

2.1 Genre Confusion

Tess is generically a complex novel with elements from many different genres and sub-genres. The difficulties encountered when trying to pinpoint it to one sub-genre only has been a source for some frustration among critics, especially in the early years after its publication.[2] Suggesting that there is a 'right' way to categorise a text is always a risky endeavour, and *Tess* resists such pigeonholing. In the following, I will examine some of the main readings of *Tess* that have appeared over the years since its publication.

In the preface to the fifth edition of *Tess*, Thomas Hardy claimed that he only aspired to be 'a mere tale-teller, who writes down how the things of the world strike him, without any

[1] Thomas Hardy, 'Hap,' 1898; repr. in *Victorian Poetry: An Annotated Anthology*, ed. Francis O'Gorman (Oxford: Blackwell, 2010), 511.
[2] On the early reception of *Tess*, see for example Gregg A. Hecimovich, *Hardy's 'Tess of the D'Urbervilles': A Reader's Guide* (London: Continuum, 2010), 98–106.

ulterior intentions whatever.'[3] This could be taken to mean that he wanted to describe the world in a realist fashion. Critics have always praised the authenticity of Hardy's nature descriptions, but those who have seemed to have expected every element of his texts to conform to a certain way of representing reality have soon been made uneasy. Andrew Lang specifically holds the 'unreality' of *Tess* against it; he is not able to believe in the characters or in the plot, therefore the novel has failed its purpose.[4] This critic expects realism, and when he finds something else, he attributes it to Hardy's lack of skill. Sir William Watson, on the other hand, maintains that it is exactly its realism that makes *Tess* special.[5] Both Gregg A. Hecimovich[6] and Linda M. Shires[7] call *Tess* anti-realistic, and John Glendening says outright that 'it is wise not to evaluate the novel by realist standards to which it does not aspire and actively opposes.'[8] Shires sees 'how the things of the world strike him' as the crux of the matter, claiming it is Hardy's *impression* of the world which he tried to convey, not a mimetic description. She refers to Hardy's view of art as 'a deformation of reality' and how the author thought he could reach something resembling truth by exaggerating certain elements of reality while ignoring others.[9] 'Art is the secret of how to produce by a false thing the effect of a true,' Margaret R. Higonnet quotes Hardy as saying, and she goes on to describe how Hardy deliberately flouted genre conventions and writing styles specifically because he wanted to produce this effect.[10]

As demonstrated by Lang above, anyone who wants to read *Tess* as an exclusively realist text soon becomes mystified. Lang chooses to strip *Tess* of the realist label and call it a romance instead, presumably to disparage it. *Tess* is romantic in the sense that it is, among other things, a love story, but, as noted by Higonnet, every scene or plot point that could be read as romantic is immediately disrupted by troublesome events or ironic commentary, which makes it deliberately 'anti-romantic.'[11] By placing Tess's rape/seduction at the beginning of the novel, Hardy turns the fallen woman narrative on its head, while at the same

[3] Thomas Hardy, 'Preface to the Fifth Edition (1892),' in Thomas Hardy, *Tess of the D'Urbervilles: A Pure Woman*, ed. Tim Dolin (London: Penguin, 2003), 464. Further references to this edition of *Tess* will be in the text.
[4] Andrew Lang, 'From *Longman's Magazine* (November 1892),'in Thomas Hardy, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles: A Pure Woman*, ed. Sarah E. Maier (Peterborough: Broadview, 2007), 446. This is based on the 1912 edition.
[5] Sir William Watson, quoted in Hecimovich, *Hardy's 'Tess,'* 101.
[6] Hecimovich, *Hardy's 'Tess,'* 104.
[7] Linda M. Shires, 'The Radical Aesthetic of *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*,' in *The Cambridge Companion to Thomas Hardy*, ed. Dale Kramer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 148.
[8] John Glendening, *The Evolutionary Imagination in Late-Victorian Novels: An Entangled Bank* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 103.
[9] Shires, 'The Radical Aesthetic of *Tess*,' 148.
[10] Margaret R. Higonnet, introduction to *Tess* (2003), xxix.
[11] Higonnet, introduction to *Tess*, xxix–xxxii.

time 'exploding the romance form.'[12] There were few viable outcomes for a fallen woman in Victorian literature. She could emigrate, move to another city, or die. In any case, she had to be permanently removed from the environment in which her 'fall' took place. Tess does die, of course, but years after her original 'transgression,' and she is adamant that the blame does not lie with her. Her being called 'pure' on the title page did not exactly conform to the common idea of the fallen woman either, as Hardy was well aware, and Tess was definitely not supposed to find love and marriage to a respectable man *after* her fall. Where many fallen women probably would have resigned and lain down to die with their children, Tess tries to shrug off her past and start a new life at Talbothays. That she is ultimately unsuccessful in this is not seen as her fault, not even by Angel, who admits that she was 'more sinned against than sinning' (232). In the same way that the fallen woman narrative starts to unravel with the romance between Angel and Tess, the romance falters with the reminder of Tess's fallen status.

The commitment to portraying the world as it appeared to him, combined with a bleakness which sometimes extends to pessimism, lead some critics to call Hardy's work naturalistic. Accurately describing human nature, or what was supposed to be human nature, had been a focus of the mid-Victorian realist wave. Naturalism, however, was regarded with more suspicion. Realistically portraying the sanitised troubles of genteel characters was one thing; exposing the relentless vulgarity of the day-to-day lives of people less fortunate was another. While New Woman writers (among others) approved of naturalists such as Zola for their frank discussions of sexual matters, the same themes were seen as immoral and dangerous by more conservative critics. Hardy frequently had to remove or rewrite scenes from his works to get them published, and by the time he wrote *Tess*, he had resigned himself to the necessity of writing a censored version for serialisation and a more extensive one for the novel readers. This was a matter of great annoyance to him, because he felt that he could not include all the elements he found essential to give his characters life.[13] William Newton claims this is the point where Hardy and the naturalists were 'most in accord,' saying of the naturalists that they 'insist that the writer of fiction should be free – nay, *must* be free – to deal with life as it is, to show the bad and the ugly with as much freedom and as much thoroughness as he shows the good and the beautiful.'[14] Hardy found this freedom compromised and in the end refused to comply with the inevitable restrictions put on his

[12] Shires, 'The Radical Aesthetic of *Tess*, 149.
[13] William Newton, 'Hardy and the Naturalists: Their Use of Physiology,' *Modern Philology* 49, no. 1 (1951): 30.
[14] Newton, 'Hardy and the Naturalists,' 30.

work. Indeed, after the stormy reception of *Jude the Obscure* (his most naturalistic novel), he had had enough of having his art constrained by what he saw as the narrow minds of the British public and quit novel writing altogether.

Naturalists followed the developments of science closely and wanted to describe a world governed by the rules of the latest scientific discoveries. Hardy's scientific language and the references to scientific phenomena are elements of *Tess* that could be deemed naturalistic. They all tie in with the wish to show the world as it really is and demonstrating how arbitrary the laws of society are compared to those of nature. As Newton points out, naturalists often used processes of nature as analogies to relationships between characters, making it clear that the characters were just as much parts of nature as everything else. This is, he claims, consistently done in *Tess*: 'No naturalist ever emphasized more insistently, or to better effect, the fact that his characters germinate along with the rest of nature than does Hardy in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*.'[15]

The same worries that concerned people about scientific advancements were apparent in their reaction to naturalism. In the words of Roger Sherman Loomis, the naturalist 'discards as obsolete three supernaturalistic concepts – Providence, absolute morality, and freedom of the will.'[16] This was obviously unsettling for people attached to these concepts, and naturalist novels were seen to present a world in which there was no moral guidance and where people's actions were determined by their biology. Hardy's Alec D'Urberville crystallises what people were afraid of: 'I am not going to feel responsible for my deeds and passions if there's nobody to be responsible to; and if I were you, my dear, I wouldn't either!' (330). Providence, as will be seen, does not exist in *Tess* (or if it exists, it is incapacitated or indifferent). Absolute morality is questioned in the sense that the laws of society are questioned, but both Tess and Angel adhere to the thought that 'you can have the religion of loving-kindness and purity, at least, if you can't have the … dogma' (330). Whether they manage to live up to these ideals is of course another matter. There might not be morals that are true for all times, but it is nevertheless, within the universe of this novel, deemed possible to hold oneself accountable without having to answer to a higher being. According to Hardy, perhaps one in fact becomes more accountable because of the new understanding of the close relationship between humans and nature: 'Hardy believes that Darwin's demonstration of the common origins of humans and animals endorses such fellow feeling and supports it with an ethical rationale.'[17] Tess's

[15] Newton, 'Hardy and the Naturalists,' 40.
[16] Roger Sherman Loomis, 'A Defense of Naturalism,' *International Journal of Ethics* 29, no. 2 (1919): 190–91.
[17] Glendening, *Evolutionary Imagination*, 79.

kinship with animals illustrates the responsibilities inherent in such a relationship. During Prince's funeral, Tess's face is 'dry and pale, as though she regarded herself in the light of a murderess' (35), while the pheasant hunters who have chosen to ignore their bond with the animal world are 'at once so unmannerly and so unchivalrous towards their weaker fellows in Nature's teeming family' (279).

In addition to 'juxtaposing or intermixing elements of classical tragedy, stage melodrama, realist novel, ballad, polemic, and comedy,'[18] embedded fairy tales and dismembered romantic plots,[19] *Tess* draws on legends, folklore, and Gothic romance. James Scott traces Hardy's use of the Gothic, and suggests that while Gothic elements are present in much of Hardy's fiction, the reason behind their presence depends on what type of fiction it is, so that the Gothic parts of a story written for fun or in the hope of earning some quick money might be there exclusively to get a reaction from the reader, i.e. as pure sensationalism. In Hardy's more serious works, on the other hand, the Gothic elements are still there, but now they take on a symbolism which elevates them to a higher level.[20] *Tess* is full of old ruins and ominous signs, and the character of Alec D'Urberville clearly stands in a tradition of Gothic villains. *Tess*'s Gothic goes beyond giving the readers a thrill or a chill down their spine, however. The graves, the blood, the pictures of ancient ancestors; they all tap into the contemporary narratives of heredity and degeneration as well as being standard components of sensation novels. Because of the prevalence of Gothic tropes in the literature at the time, readers had learnt to expect certain things when encountering them. *Tess* encourages these expectations, but their fulfilment leaves the reader puzzled rather than satisfied, such as when we occasionally see the human under Alec's diabolical façade, or when Tess walks towards Talbothays 'full of zest for life' instead of being broken down by her experiences (104). Gothic tropes and imagery assist Hardy in the aforementioned exaggeration of selected parts of reality, while their disruption defamiliarises the reader and makes the story seem more real exactly because of this disruption.

2.2 Time, Space, and the Nature of Heredity

Biology plays an important part in *Tess*. If we look to other fields of natural science, such as geology or astronomy, we see their influence on the novel as well. Thomas Hardy was passionately interested in natural science and read works of writers such as Charles Darwin

[18] Shires, 'The Radical Aesthetic of *Tess*, 156.
[19] Higonnet, introduction to *Tess*, xxxiii.
[20] James F. Scott, 'Thomas Hardy's Use of the Gothic: An Examination of Five Representative Works,' *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 17, no. 4 (1963): 378–379.

and Thomas Huxley as soon as they were published. He habitually used scientific language and images in his writing, and late-nineteenth-century scientific ideas provided the basic structure for his fiction. As shown in this list by John Glendening, the impact of especially evolutionary theory on *Tess* is immense:

> The list of 'Darwinisms' involved in *Tess* is formidable: fecundity; biological abundance; variation; environmental and hereditary determination; survival fitness; adaptation and maladaptation; competition and struggle; natural and sexual selection; death and extinction; transmutation of species; community of descent; vestigial survival; degeneration; reversion; chance and contingency; indeterminacy; ecological interdependence; and the evolution of morality.[21]

The characters of *Tess* make their way through a world that is ruled by inflexible natural laws of which they only sometimes are aware, and the inexorability of these laws is obscured or ignored by cultural practices and regulations that often have their basis in something else entirely. With Tess as a representative of the natural and Angel of the cultural, the novel examines to what degree it is possible to reconcile the two.

It is clear from the beginning of the novel that ideas of ancestry and heredity will play a part in the narrative. John Durbeyfield's learning about his noble background is the catalyst that sets the whole plot in motion. The title's connecting Tess with the D'Urbervilles immediately tells us that this relationship is important to the character. In fact, calling her Tess *of* the D'Urbervilles instead of just Tess D'Urberville/Durbeyfield can make it seem as if the D'Urbervilles are of more significance than Tess herself, reducing her to the latest incarnation of the D'Urberville spirit. The conflict between Tess as an individual and Tess as a supposed embodiment of generations of D'Urbervilles is present throughout the book.

With evolutionary theory as the backdrop, questions about heredity were vigorously discussed in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Concern about the future combined with a fear of losing old traditions led many to wonder about the mechanics of heredity. What types of characteristics would get passed on to new generations? Was there any way of controlling the process? To what extent was your life determined by your biological material? What was the meaning of the individual? *Tess* taps into this debate and draws on several different views of heredity. Jed Mayer identifies the main two as August Weismann's germ plasm theory and the theory of organic memory made known by, among others, Ewald Hering.[22] In Mayer's view, these opposing theories are played out by different groups of people in *Tess*, with the rural peasantry's passing on their accumulated organic memory, and

[21] Glendening, *Evolutionary Imagination*, 72–3.
[22] Jed Mayer, 'Germinating Memory: Thomas Hardy and Evolutionary Biology,' *Victorian Review* 26, no. 1 (2000): 83–85.

the urbane characters representing the rather bleak transferring of germ plasm.[23] With this reading, the world of *Tess* is not flawed or confused because of all the different theories informing it, as some critics have claimed,[24] but a place where different ideas are put into play and examined to see how they pan out, thus 'harmonizing discordances felt in Victorian culture,' or even within the theories themselves.[25]

Though Tess's father immediately starts acting on the news of his ancestors, boasting that '[t]here's not a man in the county o' South-Wessex that's got grander and nobler skellingtons in his family than [he]'(11), and Tess's mother thinks that 'great things may come o't' (21), the central irony of Tess's life turns out to be the distance between the possibilities promised by the existence of these great ancestors and her actual, individual experiences. In fact, even before Tess herself learns of the D'Urbervilles, the narrator drily remarks on their ability to aid her in her daily struggles:

> Pedigree, ancestral skeletons, monumental record, the D'Urberville lineaments, did not help Tess in her life's battle as yet, even to the extent of attracting to her a dancing-partner over the heads of the commonest peasantry. So much for Norman blood unaided by Victorian lucre. (17)

While Tess's parents at first (and John to the last) take the tidings of the D'Urberville name as a sign of good fortune, there are signs in Parson Tringham's conversation with John that point in a different direction. Firstly, he tells John that his family is extinct, or 'what the mendacious family chronicles call extinct in the male line – that is, gone down – gone under' (9). This is perhaps the appropriate expression, but it is still an interesting choice of words when a descendant of the family in question is standing, very much alive, right in front of you. Secondly, when commenting on John's likeness to his ancestors, the parson says he has 'the D'Urberville nose and chin – a little debased' (8). When asked what John should do with the knowledge of his ancestry, Tringham answers 'Oh – nothing, nothing; except chasten yourself with the thought of "how are the mighty fallen"' (9). While John Durbeyfield is overwhelmed by the inspiring thought of his grand 'skellingtons,' Parson Tringham focuses on the degradation of the once noble family. John thus becomes a tragicomic figure who cannot see the difference between his own situation and his family's onetime greatness. He thinks he has the ability to revive some of this greatness, but his role in the narrative is to be an example of how low the D'Urbervilles really have fallen. William Greenslade traces Hardy's early revisions of the novel's manuscript and shows that some of the major changes

[23] Mayer, 'Germinating Memory,' 85.
[24] Mayer, 'Germinating Memory,' 83.
[25] Mayer, 'Germinating Memory,' 87 and 93.

are in connection with the character of John Durbeyfield. From being a general image of a country labourer, he is 'made to enact his degeneracy as an explicit vestige of a worn-out pedigree.'[26]

Trying to take advantage of the D'Urberville relationship never leads to anything good for the Durbeyfields. In fact, even learning about their origin immediately makes things worse. John stays up all night drinking and pondering his future because of it, so Tess has to deliver the beehives for the market in the morning and manages to get their horse killed on the way. The 'fallen' D'Urbervilles sink even lower when they do not even have a horse with which to travel. Turning to Alec for help brings with it its own share of troubles, and John's hopes that Alec 'really may have serious thoughts about improving his blood by linking on to the old line' come to nothing (47). Angel is relieved when he hears of Tess's family, thinking it 'a grand card to play' when encountering snobbish attitudes towards Tess's peasant background (194). He turns against the D'Urbervilles, however, after hearing Tess's story, giving them the blame for her character. When in Brazil, he seems to come to the conclusion that Tess's ancestry cannot be held against her, but he still wonders 'what obscure strain in the D'Urberville blood had led to this aberration' after learning about Alec's murder (385). In fact, Alec seems to be the one person who sees right through the D'Urberville heritage and understands it for what it is worth – probably because his father was able to buy the name in the first place. He mocks the family skeletons and drives the point home by telling Tess that '[t]he little finger of the sham D'Urberville can do more for you than the whole dynasty of the real underneath' (364). From Alec's parvenu point of view, blood and past greatness count for little; it is what you make of yourself in the here and now that matters.

The narrator and Angel support each other in setting up Tess's fate as an inevitable result of her being the descendant of a degenerated bloodline. By focusing on her inherited character traits or noticing her likeness to her ancestors they equate her with them and imply that she simply cannot help performing the D'Urberville character. Whether they are right is another matter. Greenslade notices how Hardy's textual revisions made Tess less responsible for her own fate by a strengthened emphasis on D'Urberville traits, thus making her more palatable to the late-Victorian readers.[27] One reading of *Tess* is thus as the story of Tess's inability to escape her biologically determined destiny. Mayer sees the reading of Tess as a degenerated D'Urberville as the privileging of one heredity theory over another, however. It

[26] William Greenslade, *Degeneration, Culture and the Novel, 1880–1940* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 161.
[27] Greenslade, *Degeneration*, 162.

might as well be said that instead of living out the weaknesses of the D'Urbervilles, Tess, by becoming isolated from other humans, is able to reconnect with the natural world and, by extension, with her evolutionary past in accordance with organic memory theory.[28] Maybe it is not her ancestry that is at fault at all, but rather her environment's reactions to it. Angel's moment of clarity in Brazil might then stand as the final judgement on Tess's D'Urberville connection: 'It was a fact that would soon be forgotten – that little curiosity about poor Tess's blood and name, and oblivion would fall upon her hereditary link with the marble monuments and leaded skeletons at Kingsbere. So does Time ruthlessly destroy his own romances' (342).

Time is another important factor in *Tess*. After realising that the world had not, in fact, been created some six thousand years ago, but had been in existence for an almost unimaginable period of time, many Victorians felt that their own, short lives became dwarfed in comparison. Used to seeing themselves as the pinnacle of creation, the beings everything else existed *for*, they now had to come to terms with the fact that the Earth had existed for millions or perhaps even billions of years before humans made their appearance. *Tess* not only questions the value of the individual by placing Tess at the end of a long line of ancestors; it also consistently contrasts the lives of its characters with the vastness of deep time. According to Gillian Beer, one of the main challenges for the novel's characters, and especially for Tess, is how to be able to equally and simultaneously exist in their individual time, historical time, *and* geological time.[29] References to ancient customs, long-dead ancestors, prehistoric soil, and the relentless passing of time can make Tess's life seem small and unimportant to the outside viewer, while for Tess herself, '[t]he universe itself only came into being … on the particular day in the particular year in which she was born' (154).

Not only the vastness of time, but also the immensity of space is used as a contrast to the smallness of humanity. While going to the market, Abraham asks Tess questions about the stars, 'whose cold pulses were beating amid the black hollows above, in serene dissociation from these two wisps of human life' (31). The focus of Tess's life is made clear when she is trailing Angel in the streets without ever looking up at the sky above her: 'Across these minute pools the reflected stars flitted in a quick transit as she passed; she would not have known they were shining overhead if she had not seen them there – the vastest things of the universe imagined in objects so mean' (231). Abraham's 'prattle' soon enough returns to 'what impressed his imagination even more deeply than the wonders of creation' (31), though,

[28] Mayer, 'Germinating Memory,' 92.
[29] Gillian Beer, *Darwin's Plots: Evolutionary Narrative in Darwin, George Eliot and Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, 3rd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 235.

namely the thought of Tess's marrying a gentleman. What is happening in the here and now is always felt to be more real, its being composed of intense colour, smell, and texture, as opposed to the distant coldness of time and space. The lamp at a railway station, for example, is 'a poor enough terrestrial star, yet in one sense of more importance to Talbothays Dairy and mankind than the celestial ones to which it stood in such humiliating contrast' (186). The effect of these continual reminders of the endlessness of time and space is not to make the reader feel that Tess's story does not matter. On the contrary, it seems to matter *more*, or as Glendening notes: 'Tess's own life is all the more significant because the novel asserts its specialness against, and despite, the backdrop of time's immensity.'[30]

2.3 The Religions of *Tess*

The characters of *Tess* live in a supposedly Christian culture where everyone is expected to adhere to Christian practices and morals. This does not mean that all the characters are actively religious, however, and there are also leftover elements from older faiths lurking in corners. Christianity, Paganism, Hellenism, and miscellaneous country superstitions and traditions all influence the world of *Tess*.

Pagan thoughts and practices are referred to throughout the novel, especially in connection with women. Christianity might be taught at schools and in Church, but the effect, especially on the peasantry, is doubtful. Old superstitions and remnants of old faiths saturate the rural communities, and signs and omens are seen as natural. 'A curious, fetishistic fear' makes Joan Durbeyfield unable to sleep with the *Complete Fortune Teller* in the house (23), so they have to take it in and out of the outhouse every day. The narrator sets up a contrast between Tess, with her education and modern line of thought, and her mother, 'with her fast-perishing lumber of superstitions, folk-lore, dialect, and orally transmitted ballads' (23), but Tess is not completely removed from the old ways. She might reach for an old church blessing to properly rejoice in her existence, but her choice is immediately devalued by her wondering if she really knows the Lord, and the narrator's claiming it as probable that her song is 'a Fetichistic utterance in a Monotheistic falsetto' (104). Singing Christian songs does not make you a devout Christian, and in the novel's geological perspective of time, Christianity is a rather recent invention anyway. Older beliefs stay on in the peasantry, especially in those who are close to nature in some way: '[W]omen whose chief companions are the forms and forces of outdoor Nature retain in their souls far more of the Pagan fantasy

[30] Glendening, *Evolutionary Imagination*, 89.

of their remote forefathers than of the systematized religion taught their race at later date' (104).

Peasants in the novel are more connected to nature than people of other social classes, and women more so than men. This connection is seen as a positive thing, even (and perhaps even especially) when it is so close-knit that the person's individuality disappears. The narrator refers to 'the charm which is acquired by woman when she becomes part and parcel of outdoor nature, and is not merely an object set down therein as at ordinary times' (87–88). An 'object set down' is disassociated from its surroundings; its presence is unnatural, artificial. The ideal, then, would be for the individual to merge completely with nature, to lose this element of having been 'set down'. This is seen as achievable by the women in the field, but not the men: 'A field-man is a personality afield; a field-woman is a portion of the field; she has somehow lost her own margin, imbibed the essence of her surrounding, and assimilated herself with it' (88).

Who does the 'setting down,' though? Judging by all the references to how nature has made so-and-so, there is not really room for a creator-God in this world, other than as an 'unsympathetic First-Cause' (154). Why would nature create something unsuited to its environment? The answer seems to be that it does not; that it is in fact humans who make themselves unfit by distancing themselves from nature. Industrialisation, education, urbanisation, and moral rules and regulations steadily increase the gap between the 'natural' and the contemporary human. Organised religion is seen as one of the things that widen this gap, while Paganism, in its worship of nature, bridges it. Angel, after living 'the outdoor life' for a while, discovers that the closeness of nature and the lack of excessive intellectual stimuli heal something in him that he perhaps was not aware had been broken: 'Considering his own position he became wonderfully free from the chronic melancholy which is taking hold of the civilized races with the decline of belief in a beneficent Power' (118).

Angel and Tess live in different worlds when it comes to religion. He has grown up in a devoutly Christian environment, while she is the embodiment of country pragmatism. In contrast to Marlott's vicar, who spent ten years 'graft[ing] technical belief on actual scepticism' (96), Angel, while still 'lov[ing] the Church as one loves a parent' (115), cannot in good conscience become a minister when he knows that he does not agree with the Church's central tenets. His relationship with the Church is close and familial, and he examines its teachings in order to decide for himself what he should believe. It is an intellectual approach to faith, and when he comes to the conclusion that he cannot do anything for the Church in its current form, he feels obliged to choose a different career. While he

discards Christian rituals such as going to Church on Sundays, he is not above praising Tess's Church attendance to his parents even if he had slighted it in his mind 'because of its obvious unreality amid beliefs essentially demonistic' (164). He might have lost his faith in Church doctrine, but he is still 'a stickler for good morals' (224), and he is affronted that his brother should think that he is 'likely to drop [his] high thinking and [his] moral ideals' (160). In fact, one of the reasons he saw himself unfit for the Church was that he had failed in following these ideals. He tells Tess (who tells Alec) that it is possible to have morals without faith, but he fails to examine where his morals originate. In the words of Felicia Bonaparte: 'Consciously, he may repudiate Christianity as a theology, but his neglected irrational self slides inevitably into the patterns of Judeo-Christian thought.'[31]

Tess's approach to faith is neither spiritual, nor theological, but practical. As Angel recognises, she practices the basic rituals, but she does not attach any particular meaning to them. Her one truly religious experience in the Christian sense, Sorrow's baptism, ends rather anticlimactically. In the middle of the baptism, Tess takes on an almost divine aspect in her 'ecstasy of faith' (95). This still does not stop Sorrow from drawing his last breath a few hours later. Neither does it stop Tess from deciding that she does not want to be associated with any heaven that refuses to let her in because she has had the temerity to baptise her own child. While timid and uncertain, she still tells the parson that she will not come to his church any more if he does not let Sorrow have a Christian burial. When Church practices or regulations from Tess's perspective seem lacking, she moves around them, creating her own rules. After falling in love with Angel, she disposes of God altogether. On her wedding day, she 'trie[s] to pray to God, but it [is] her husband who really ha[s] her supplication' (214). Whereas Angel studies and meditates to make up his mind, Tess adopts Angel's ideas without questioning. 'And so I threw in my spiritual lot wi' his,' she tells Alec, after saying she does not believe in anything supernatural (321–22). Tess's approach to belief is deeply pragmatic, a continual assessment of what is sensible and practical *for her* at the moment.

Choosing not to believe in anything supernatural is one thing; moving through a world full of superstitions and religious maxims without being affected by them is another. There are several coincidences in the novel that might lead Tess (and the reader) to the conclusion that Tess is being punished or even toyed with by some higher being. Why should the man who paints Bible verses pick exactly the seventh commandment when she is present? Why does Alec look up from his preaching just as she passes the open doors of the barn? Why does

[31] Felicia Bonaparte, 'The Deadly Misreading of Mythic Texts: Thomas Hardy's "Tess of the d'Urbervilles,"' *International Journal of the Classic Tradition* 5, no. 3 (1998): 426.

the Cross-in-Hand have to be 'a thing of ill-omen' instead of a holy cross (312)? All of this can certainly give the impression that there is a malignant force steadily steering Tess towards her dismal end. The bleakness and apparent hopelessness of the novel can lead the reader to think that Tess is doomed from the outset. Hardy received some criticism for the last paragraph of the novel, with its 'the President of the Immortals … had ended his sport with Tess' (397). In his review of *Tess*, Andrew Lang wrote that 'If there is a God, who can seriously think of Him as a malicious fiend? And if there be none, the expression is meaningless.'[32] Gregg Hecimovich suggests that Hardy chose to answer Lang's review in the Preface to the 1892 edition of *Tess* because he was worried that readers would be prejudiced away from the novel or from 'its tragic design' if they thought him disrespectful of Christianity: 'Hardy's concern here is that he will be painted as an aggressive atheist, portraying the Christian God as "malicious."'[33] Apart from that one reference to a certain president, there are no allusions to a God actively working towards making Tess's life difficult. Claiming that Hardy was trying to paint the Christian God as evil would be too simple, as would calling the expression 'meaningless.'

Hardy's portrayal of himself as 'a mere tale-teller, who writes down how the things of the world strike him, without any ulterior intentions whatever,' might look innocent enough on the surface. Surely 'how the things of the world strike him' has its effect upon the readers, however.[34] By making Lang's accusation of blasphemy seem slightly ridiculous and then ensuring the readers that he is only describing the world as it appears to him, Hardy both deflects the attention away from the issue of a possibly malevolent God *and* suggests that his version of reality is the true one. And in his reality there is, of course, no God, or if there is, he is not interested in the fates of human beings at all. Divine intervention fails to happen for Tess. At the most crucial point in her young life, when Alec is about to rape her, the narrator opens up the possibility that someone could have saved her – but no one does: 'But where was Tess's guardian angel? where was Providence? Perhaps, like that other god of whom the ironical Tishbite spoke, he was talking, or he was pursuing, or he was in a journey, or peradventure he was sleeping and was not to be awaked' (74). The contrast between innocently trusting in God and realising that you have to look out for yourself is made crystal clear in the scene where Tess asks her younger siblings to sing her a song the last night before they have to leave their home. Impressed by the situation's gravity, the children sing of

[32] Andrew Lang, quoted in Hecimovich, *Hardy's 'Tess,'* 100.
[33] Hecimovich, *Hardy's 'Tess,'* 101.
[34] Hardy, 'Preface to the Fifth Edition,' 464.

heaven and how all their troubles will cease when they get there. Tess is not so sure: 'If she could only believe what the children were singing; if she were only sure, how different all would now be; how confidently she would leave them to Providence and their future kingdom! But, in default of that, it behoved her to do something; to be their Providence' (357). Ironically, what is required for Tess to be her family's Providence is to go back to the man from which Providence initially failed to protect her.

Even when the characters actively turn to religion for support, it turns out to be inadequate. Tess finds that her love for Angel overshadows everything else: 'Neither a religious sense of a certain moral validity in the previous union nor a conscientious wish for candour could hold out against it much longer' (181). The God she learnt about as a child did not help her escape Alec's attentions, and neither does he help her resist Angel's. Alec hopes that a marriage between Tess and him 'might be a sanctification for [them] both' (317), only to have that hope destroyed by the fact that she is already married to another man; a man who in the end will be indirectly responsible not only for Alec's loss of faith and desertion of his ministry, but also for his death. Alec's story on the whole is an example of how the narrative makes it clear that religion is not to be trusted. The first time we hear of Alec in connection with the Church is when Angel's father tells Angel of his encounter with the infamous D'Urberville. The effect is to illustrate Mr Clare's naivety and innocent faith, because we as readers do not for a minute believe that the villainous Alec would care to change his sinful ways. Tess agrees with us, because even after she has seen Alec preach and heard his story, she tells him that she 'can't believe in such sudden things,' and rightly points out the unfairness of his being able to sin as much as he likes and then get redemption, while she has to pay every day for what was done to her (309). The sincerity of Alec's conversion changes with the different editions, with his being the most zealous in the 1891 edition and gradually less earnest in the following ones.[35] Whether sincere or not, it is surely troubling that he spares no thought for the implications of his wandering around the countryside, preaching to everyone who will listen, propagating beliefs that will make his listeners condemn women in Tess's position, put there by men like him. When he gives Tess the blame for his eventual fall, it only completes the picture.

The Christian, Pagan, and mythic elements all meet in the final scene at Stonehenge. Angel leads Tess there as if he were Abraham leading Isaac. Tess does not know what the place is, or what it was used for, but she drapes herself over the altar as if she were a willing

[35] Tim Dolin, 'A History of the Text,' in *Tess* (2003), lxi–ii.

sacrifice. Bonaparte, in her reading of *Tess* as the myth of Persephone, sees the scene as the conflation of several myths, and perhaps the image of a ritual sacrifice truly is where all the beliefs present in the novel come together:

> Hardy brings Tess at the end of the novel not to the beneficent sun of the Homeric *Hymn to Demeter* but to a sun that can be appeased, as it was thought in Druid worship, only by a human sacrifice. This is the sacrifice that Hardy re-enacts in this critical scene. … Different as may appear the creeds of Apollo and of the Druids, the rationalism represented in the worship of the sun cannot but end in this bloody sacrifice.[36]

The continual absence of a Christian God is underlined by Angel's refusing to tell her they will meet in the afterlife, and ironically he is compared to Jesus as he does so. The sunrise evokes the connection between Stonehenge and sun worship, while men stand around Tess's sleeping body like so many officiating priests.

2.4 Sexual Selection

The relationship between the sexes became increasingly more complex during the nineteenth century as more and more women were demanding to be regarded as individuals in their own right. Evolutionary theory complicated matters further. The suggestion that humans were no more than high-functioning animals led people to question rules they earlier had thought of as written in stone. The guidelines on how to perform masculinity or femininity had seemed clear, as had the roles ascribed to both husbands and wives. Now discussions arose as to whether these rules had their origin in society, religion, or nature, and what the eventual consequences might be. What if the cultural and the natural turned out to be in actual opposition or conflict?

As pointed out by Glendening, the moral universe of *Tess* 'entails a divide between nature and culture, with each further separated between negative and positive aspects.'[37] This divide is especially apparent when it comes to sex, where the goals and motivations of the two are at odds. The laws of culture are there to protect values such as purity, virginity, and monogamy. Nature has no such values; it cares for the continuation of the species only. 'What a genuine daughter of Nature that milkmaid is!,' Angel thinks when first noticing Tess (120). After learning about her past, he feels himself deceived because '[n]othing so pure, so sweet, so virginal as Tess had seemed possible all the long while that he had adored her,' and still she turns out not to be a virgin (235). 'She looked absolutely pure. Nature, in her fantastic trickery, had set such a seal of maidenhood upon Tess's countenance' that Angel finds it

[36] Bonaparte, 'Deadly Misreading,' 429.
[37] Glendening, *Evolutionary Imagination*, 74.

almost impossible to believe that maidenhood gone, as if he could tell the status of her hymen by looking at her face (237). If he had examined his thoughts a little more carefully, he would perhaps have realised that nature is not interested in virginity, and that being a 'genuine daughter of Nature' might denote quite different characteristics from what he supposes. In the later editions, Angel eventually comes close to understanding that society's fetishisation of virginity is something that can be questioned just as much as the Christian doctrines he already has rejected.

By calling Tess 'a pure woman' on the title page, Hardy initiated a heated discussion among his readers and critics, and for a long time many of the reactions to the novel revolved around the question of Tess's purity.[38] With every revision after the 1891 edition, Hardy made the relationship between Tess and Alec more ambiguous.[39] Whereas the question in the 1891 edition (where Tess is clearly raped) could be whether Tess's purity really has been lost when her virginity was taken by force, the later editions go further in discussing exactly what purity is. Exonerating a raped Tess out of compassion and a sense of justice is one thing, but what about a Tess who is 'seduced' instead of raped? Even Angel only goes so far as to think he should have 'regarded that abhorrence of the un-intact state, which he had inherited with the creed of mysticism, as at least open to correction *when the result was due to treachery*.'[40] How would he have reacted to a Tess who had chosen to enter into a previous relationship? While making allowances for Tess's situation, he is still not truly questioning the rules of his society; he is only looking for a loophole. In blurring the extent of Tess's agency while standing by her purity, Hardy introduced the possibility that purity might not be linked to sex at all, or at least not in the way Angel assumes. Purity might instead be about staying close to nature – and part of that nature is related to reproduction. In fact, as Glendening points out, Hardy proposes in *Tess* that 'sex itself, apart from procreation, is a potential source of joy as well as trouble, and for both sexes'.[41]

'Nature' tells Angel of Tess's supposed virginity, while to Alec, nature's giving Tess large breasts speaks of something else, making Tess 'appear more of a woman than she really [is]' (42). Glendening suggests that Tess is ill-adapted to her environment because her beauty and obvious sensuality make men like Alec want to seduce her instead of marrying her.[42] Tess herself feels that she is misread by society because of her looks: 'And there was revived in her

[38] Hecimovich, *Hardy's 'Tess,'* 99.
[39] Dolin, 'A History of the Text,' lvi–iii.
[40] Hardy, *Tess* (2007), 344.
[41] Glendening, *Evolutionary Imagination*, 79.
[42] Glendening, *Evolutionary Imagination*, 92.

the wretched sentiment which had often come to her before, that in inhabiting the fleshy tabernacle with which nature had endowed her she was somehow doing wrong' (310). The fact that Angel reads Tess's appearance as innocent while Alec sees it as voluptuous illustrates the fact that nature's 'endowments' might not actually signify anything on their own; it is the interpretation made in a specific cultural context by a particular person that gives them their supposed meaning. Tess is as nature has made her, but society persists in judging her by its own criteria.

The nature of women was in itself highly topical in the 1890s. With women asking for such traditionally male prerogatives as higher education or the vote, it became important to decide whether they so far had been denied these privileges based on cultural or on natural reasons. Biology was used by many to explain why it would not only be against nature, but actively harmful, to allow women these rights. Henry Maudsley, for one, claimed that by giving women educational rights, their reproductive purpose would be endangered, and that the people campaigning for women's education 'would do better in the end if they would begin by realizing the fact that the male organization is one, and the female organization another.'[43] It was seen as natural for women to spend their lives bearing and raising children, and work or education could put this in jeopardy. The argument for women's right to reproduce did not stretch too far, however, because the seemingly simple act of procreation was surrounded by cultural norms and regulations. If women's rights to having children had been the only aim, women would have been able to bear children out of wedlock without shame, with partners of their choice, and Angel would not have condemned Tess for her past.

Glendening describes the conflict between the cultural and the natural when it comes to sexual selection, a process severely complicated by Victorian culture's mating rituals.[44] When the only accepted place for having children was within marriage, a prospective mate had to be fitting spouse material, not only a fitting combination of genes. The person you were physically attracted to, or the one who was, evolutionary speaking, best suited to parent your children, might not be compatible with your station, race, religion, politics, morality, or general frame of mind. Angel rationalises his attraction to Tess by stressing the fact that he needs a wife who knows her way around a farm. In his discussions with himself and with his family, his focus is on the point that Tess's peasant background makes her able to meet his particular needs. She suits him both physically and practically. After making up his mind, he

[43] Henry Maudsley, *Sex in Mind and in Education* (Syracuse: C. W. Bardeen, 1884), accessed January 26, 2012, http://www.archive.org/stream/sexinmindandine00maudgoog#page/n6/mode/2up, 4.
[44] Glendening, *Evolutionary Imagination*, 71–2.

cannot see any reason for their not being together. When they part ways, it is not because the attraction is gone, but because Angel cannot reconcile himself with Tess's past. It is only after he has realised how minor this difference is in comparison with their mutual compatibility, that they can finally be together, and then it is, of course, too late.

In late-Victorian society, with its preoccupation with heredity, choosing the right mate was an important and difficult decision for many. If you chose wrong, not only your personal happiness, but the possible future of the human race could be seen to be at stake. Having children with the wrong person could, according to eugenicist theory, result in sickly and weak offspring who would then pass these traits on to their children – if they were even capable of having children. Eugenicists such as H. G. Wells and Sarah Grand stressed the importance of taking heredity into account when choosing your mate. While Darwin claimed that among human beings, males were the ones who did the choosing, women were still held responsible for hereditary problems.[45] As mothers or mothers in waiting, women were supposed to ensure that the next generation would be healthy and strong. To neglect this responsibility would mean taking the risk of giving birth to a sickly child.

Tess is not given the chance to have more children, so we do not really know if the blame for Sorrow's condition lies on his mother's or his father's side of the family. Much is made out of the degeneration of Tess's ancestral family and of her position as the last link in a long and slowly deteriorating chain of descendants of the original D'Urbervilles. It would be perfectly in keeping with the general degeneration narrative to have Tess's bloodline ending with her, in ways similar to what happens with the Fawley line in *Jude the Obscure*. Degeneration would inevitably end in sterility, according to, among others, Max Nordau, and afflicted families would eventually die out.[46] If Tess is 'the exhausted seedling of an effete aristocracy' (232), Sorrow is a shoot that never gets the chance to grow. But does his death herald the end of the D'Urbervilles? Tess's parents have not exactly been lacking in fecundity, and all their children seem healthy and robust. One of the main physical characteristics associated with Tess is exactly her body's being the image of country freshness and well-being. Beer draws attention to the fact that Tess is her mother's daughter as well as her father's, and that she is a possible source of new and healthy variations of human beings as well as being part of a supposedly withered branch of the D'Urberville family tree.[47] When Hardy calls Tess 'an almost typical woman, but for the slight incautiousness of character

[45] Greenslade, *Degeneration*, 165.
[46] Max Nordau, *Degeneration* (1895; repr., Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1993), 16.
[47] Beer, *Darwin's Plots*, 240.

inherited from her race' (90), he tells us that she is an almost perfect human specimen, with a slight deviation from type occasioned by her ancestry.[48] This deviation does not explain the frailty of her child, but it might explain the reason for her becoming pregnant in the first place. Tess's 'want of firmness' is alluded to throughout the book, and Angel even implies that she could have resisted Alec's advances a little more forcefully, as if she were responsible for letting the rape happen.

Once Alec has set his eyes on Tess, the result seems to be inevitable, and after Angel has decided Tess is the one for him, she is unable to resist. They both feel that she is suited to them. But which man is the one most suited to Tess? Both Angel and Alec seem to think that Alec has a right to her because he was with her first. 'How can we live together while that man lives?' Angel asks Tess after her confession (243), while Alec angrily reminds her that '[i]f you are any man's wife you are mine!' (332). Glendening claims Alec is 'ill-adapted to [Tess's] emotional needs'[49] and therefore unsuited to be her mate, while in Bonaparte's reading of *Tess*, it is Angel who is the intruder, because he is misreading Tess, her mythical narrative, and her place in it, as well as his own.[50] In this latter view, Alec should have been Tess's husband instead of Angel, because only he has a clear understanding of how their story is 'supposed' to unfold.

According to common contemporary standards of morality, Tess belongs with Alec if she is to be with anyone. Alec's reaction to Tess's saying she loves somebody else illustrates the point: 'But has not a sense of what is morally right and proper any weight with you?' (316). Even though they have not seen each other for some three years, she is still supposed to think herself bound to him and no one else. Especially after learning about the child, Alec cannot seem to let go of the thought of Tess. It is as if the existence of offspring cements the bond between them and makes them true mates in Alec's eyes. What he does not choose to dwell on, however, is the fact that Sorrow was too weak to live. From a Darwinian point of view, this should be a clear signal for Alec that he is not meant to father Tess's children, but this is not something he acknowledges. It could even mean that he should not father children at all. As the quintessential rake, he is a typical example of the kind of man the eugenicists would advise women to avoid, not only because of the potential threat to their virtue, but because of the dangers of sexually transmitted diseases such as syphilis, which was perceived to be hereditary. That Tess and Alec's child is unable to survive might just as well be due to

[48] Beer, *Darwin's Plots*, 198.
[49] Glendening, *Evolutionary Imagination*, 93.
[50] Bonaparte, 'Deadly Misreading,' 429–30.

Alec's questionable history as to Tess's degenerated family. In any case, it is clear that the two of them should not have children together.

Angel and Tess never get to know how their potential children would have turned out, but there is a slight chance for the continuation of their bloodlines in the possibility of a forthcoming relationship between Angel and Tess's sister. 'She has all the best of me without the bad of me,' Tess says of Liza-Lu (394), and it may be that the slight deviation from type is not continued in her. Angel and Liza-Lu's walking away hand in hand at the end of the book seems to point to a relationship between them in the future, but whether this will be one between in-laws or spouses is not disclosed. As for their eventual children, maybe they will be the children Angel and Tess could never have, cleansed from the D'Urberville taint – or maybe they will discover that the deviation from type apparent in Tess is dormant in Liza-Lu as well. It might be that the image of the future union between Angel and Tess's sister is, in fact, yet another example of what Beer calls Hardy's 'ghost plots,' which make the reader aware of the possibility of a happy outcome – only to have it subverted by the actual events of the narrative.[51]

2.5 Hardy and the *Fin de Siècle*

People critical of Hardy have often reacted negatively to the perceived confusion in his writing, a confusion that has also been seen as inflicted by his treatment of scientific discourse. When presented with a textual world obviously governed by evolutionary dynamics, critics have tried to discover exactly to which evolutionary theory Hardy adhered.[52] After deciding on an answer, all elements that pointed towards other theories were taken to be irrelevant, or signs of Hardy's misunderstanding the implications of scientific theories such as those of evolution and heredity. In much the same way, some critics were trying to find the 'right' place for his writings.[53] As with Andrew Lang above, anything that deviated from the genre conventions they thought he was trying to follow was met with the suspicion that Hardy did not always know what he was doing. The very style of his writing presented another challenge. Complaining about Hardy's use of 'semi-scientific phraseology out of place,'[54] Lang notes that Hardy's style can appear as 'jarring' and unsettling.[55]

[51] Beer, *Darwin's Plots*, 223.
[52] Mayer, 'Germinating Memory,' 82.
[53] Newton, 'Hardy and the Naturalists,' 28.
[54] Lang, 'From *Longman's Magazine* (1892),' 445.
[55] Hecimovich, *Hardy's 'Tess*,' 41.

In *Degeneration*, Nordau describes doubt and uncertainty as the main characteristics of the so-called *fin-de-siècle* frame of mind.[56] New knowledge of how the world worked, or how old it really was, did not always make people feel more certain of their place in the universe. What was now presented as scientific facts disagreed with the way they had been taught to think, and the more people learnt, the more disoriented some of them felt. Some of this confusion is acted out for us by the characters in *Tess*, and the fact that the novel is composed of 'jarring' shifts in language, different narratives of evolution and heredity, a mixture of old faiths and new, and frequent jumps between genres, does not necessarily mean that Hardy himself was confused when writing it; it might well be that this was what he needed to represent what he felt to be 'a true sequence of things.'[57] After all, as he explained in a letter about *Tess*: 'you often best keep the rules by occasionally breaking them.'[58]

[56] Nordau, *Degeneration*, 5–6.
[57] Hardy, 'Explanatory Note,' in *Tess* (2003), 3.
[58] Thomas Hardy, *The Life and Work of Thomas Hardy*, ed. Michael Millgate (London: Macmillan, 1984), quoted in Higonnet, introduction to *Tess*, xxix.

3 'The Blood Is the Life': Bram Stoker's *Dracula*[1]

Over the earth the shadows creep with deepening gloom,
wrapping all objects in a mysterious dimness,
in which all certainty is destroyed
and any guess seems plausible.
Forms lose their outlines,
and are dissolved in floating mist.
The day is over, the night draws on.[2]

While *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* is set in a rural environment, Bram Stoker's *Dracula* has a distinctly urban feel to it, even if much of the action takes place outside of London. The characters are modern men and women of the 1890s, and the only one who seems truly connected to the past is the one who must be destroyed, namely the Count himself. In this novel, the past exists mostly as a place for evil to originate, while the 'good' characters are very much of the contemporary world.

The novel, in short, seems to embrace modern life, at least on the surface. Its characters use cutting-edge technology as a matter of course, and they frequently refer to contemporary medical and scientific discourse. Although Mina's delight in travelling typewriters and phonographs expresses an optimistic attitude towards the latest inventions, not all features of so-called progress were greeted as enthusiastically by people at the time. Some of the developments that worried and baffled the late Victorians are apparent in this description by William Greenslade:

> Rapidly expanding populations in larger cities where extremes of wealth and poverty were concentrated as never before, gave rise to new forms of social organisation and new patterns of mobility and access. The scale and speed of these developments were unprecedented, their psychological and behavioural consequences profound. Religious belief, moral codes, attitudes to class, to sexual roles, to sexuality itself underwent seismic disturbance and shock, as well as subsidence and erosion. And the world emerging from the ruins of the old was baffling as well as new.[3]

In a vampire story rarely regarded as more than a cheap sensation novel at the time (although a successful one),[4] we can find traces of these anxieties and follow a scenario where fears about the fate of the British nation, the relationship between man and woman, and even the

[1] Parts of this chapter have been presented in a term paper for the 'Literature of the 1890s' course at the University of Leeds in semester 1, 2010.
[2] Max Nordau, *Degeneration* (1895; repr., Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1993), 6.
[3] William Greenslade, *Degeneration, Culture and the Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 15.
[4] Christopher Frayling, preface to *Dracula*, by Bram Stoker (London: Penguin, 2003), vii–iii. Further references to *Dracula* will be in the text.

future of the human race itself are calmed through the destruction of the vampire, the being in whom all these dangers originate.

3.1 Degeneration

Not all changes of the industrial age were seen as improvements by the late Victorians, and uncertainty about tomorrow gave the turn of the century particular significance. By the 1890s, many looked towards the new century with trepidation, and some worried that the age itself was sick. This nervousness about the future was eventually classified as a sign of sickness not of the times, but of nervous individuals. In his *Degeneration* (originally published in German as *Entartung* in 1892), Max Nordau remarks that 'it is in accordance with this naïvely egoistic tendency that the French ascribe their own senility to the century, and speak of the *fin-de-siècle* when they ought correctly to say *fin-de-race*.'[5] After an initial feeling of optimism over the possibilities latent in the notion of evolution, as noted in the Introduction of this thesis, there was now increasing suspicion that mankind might not necessarily be moving towards something better, and that it could be just as likely that humans would regress to an almost animal state. Nordau, who, in the words of Bram Dijkstra, 'merely expressed what was on everybody's mind,'[6] concretised this unease in his theory of degeneration and tried to convince the public that though the threat was real, it was also something that could be managed:

> Through his theory of degeneracy Nordau reassured the bourgeoisie that these instabilities all had one common cause and were curable, since they came from the outside, from the atavistic, infertile, childlike mind of the degenerate.[7]

Hans-Peter Söder shows how Nordau's book in some ways was soothing to the late-Victorian readership because degeneration was turned into something tangible, and according to Daniel Pick, this was also one of the attractions of Bram Stoker's *Dracula*. The threat of degeneration was here displaced onto a physical being (the vampire) which then could be destroyed, thus symbolically doing away with the more general threat.[8] The being here also conveniently came from the outside, so that the (non-Romanian) readers could imagine themselves free from any lurking danger within their own country.

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[5] Nordau, *Degeneration*, 2.
[6] Bram Dijkstra, *Idols of Perversity: Fantasies of Feminine Evil in Fin-de-Siècle Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 212.
[7] Hans-Peter Söder, 'Disease and Health as Contexts of Modernity: Max Nordau as a Critic of Fin-de-Siècle Modernism,' *German Studies Review* 14, no. 3 (1991): 475.
[8] Daniel Pick, '"Terrors of the Night": *Dracula* and "Degeneration" in the Late Nineteenth Century,' *Critical Quarterly* 30, no. 4 (1988): 71.

The degeneration of Count Dracula himself is noted by many critics.[9] Both Mina Harker and Dr Van Helsing actually use the language of degeneration to describe Dracula. Van Helsing outlines the history of Dracula's ancestry (something which the Count also does himself, at great length) and impresses the nobility and greatness of the Draculas on his listeners. The current count, however, is the last of his kind, and he is not even a man anymore; he is a 'man-that-was' (256) with 'a child-brain' (322) who is 'predestinate to crime' (363). Mina even says that 'Nordau and Lombroso' would classify Dracula as 'a criminal and of criminal type' (363). These criminal types were to be easily recognised by certain shared physical characteristics, and the criminal himself was 'an atavistic being who reproduces in his person the ferocious instincts of primitive humanity, and the inferior animals.'[10] Cesare Lombroso, an Italian physician and criminologist, had in his *L'uomo delinquente* (1876; *Criminal Man*, the first complete translation into English, was published as late as 2006, while an abbreviated translation was available in 1911) explained in detail what these characteristics looked like and what they signified. Nordau built on Lombroso's work in *Degeneration* and used these traits to identify degenerates, proposing that Lombroso's '"born criminals" [were] nothing but a subdivision of degenerates.'[11] The explicit reference to Nordau and Lombroso should, if earlier clues had not been enough, instantly make the reader aware of Dracula's degenerate nature. Nordau and Lombroso's theories were highly topical at the time, and readers of the work would be expected to know about them.[12] Their being well known medical men lends weight to Mina's argument. In the same way, Mina's application of their theories confirms them in the eyes of the reader.

Even at their first meeting, Jonathan Harker draws attention to Dracula's animal characteristics. The Count has 'peculiarly sharp white teeth,' ears which are 'extremely pointed' at the tops, long nails resembling claws, and hands with hairy palms (24–25). Jonathan's reaction to Dracula's touch gives us a further clue: he 'could not repress a shudder. It may have been that [Dracula's] breath was rank, but a horrible feeling of nausea came over [Jonathan]' (25). Jonathan instinctively feels that there is something wrong with Dracula, though he does not know what it is. He tries to give a rational explanation for his revulsion (Dracula's breath was rank), but it is evident that his reaction is caused by something more sinister than halitosis. By the time he sees Dracula crawl down the outside of the castle 'just

[9] See for example Kathleen L. Spencer, 'Purity and Danger: *Dracula*, the Urban Gothic, and the Late Victorian Degeneracy Crisis,' *ELH* 59, no. 1 (1992): 213–14.
[10] Cesare Lombroso, quoted in Greenslade, *Degeneration*, 91.
[11] Nordau, *Degeneration*, 17.
[12] Greenslade, *Degeneration*, 95.

as a lizard moves along a wall' (41), it has become fully clear to him that the Count is not human in the same sense that he himself is. He now questions what 'manner of man is this, or what manner of creature is it in the semblance of a man?' (41). Lombroso gives the answer when he says of his 'born criminal' that he has an 'irresistible craving for evil for its own sake, the desire not only to extinguish life in the victim, but to mutilate the corpse, tear its flesh, and *drink its blood*.'[13] In his article 'Zoological Retrogression' (1891), H. G. Wells claims that the most efficient cause for degeneration in animals is 'an aptness for parasitism,' eventually reducing the animal to, as in case of the tapeworm, 'an insensible mechanism of evil,'[14] both of which could be applied to the vampire.

One point on which Nordau and Lombroso differed was in their views of the degeneracy of genius. Lombroso had written a whole book (*L'uomo di genio* (1888), translated into English as *The Man of Genius* in 1891) in which he outlined his theory that genius was just another form of degeneration. Nordau's *Degeneration*, however, was a critique of contemporary art written from the position that brilliant – and 'healthy' – art should be possible, but the argument was that many of the artists of the day unfortunately were degenerate and therefore unable (and unwilling) to produce something of real and lasting value. William Hughes notes with Victor Sage the similarities between Count Dracula and Van Helsing, and suggests that, if you follow Lombroso's view, Van Helsing and Dracula can be seen as exemplifying each extreme of degeneracy, with Van Helsing as the genius and the vampire as the criminal.[15] Andrew Smith claims that 'Van Helsing's descriptions of the Count imply that Dracula is, intellectually speaking, like an early version of himself.'[16] The way Van Helsing is presented as clearly on the side of good, acting as mentor and spiritual leader of the group of young vampire hunters, suggests a more black-and-white doubling, with him and Dracula as incarnations of good and evil. At the same time, his physical likeness to the Count, his 'foreign' ways of speaking and acting, and his nervous outbursts in times of strain, all point to the possibility of a taint in Van Helsing himself.

Dracula could be said to be degeneracy personified, but, as we have seen, he might not be the only source of degeneration in the novel. Years go by while he prepares for his journey to England. The threat to the English population has thus existed long before the beginning of the narrative. Spencer suggests that Lucy Westenra can be said to practically invite Dracula

[13] Lombroso, quoted in Greenslade, *Degeneration*, 92. The italics are mine.
[14] H. G. Wells, 'Zoological Retrogression,' in *The Fin de Siècle: A Reader in Cultural History, c. 1880–1900*, ed. Sally Ledger and Roger Luckhurst (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 9.
[15] William Hughes, *Bram Stoker: Dracula; A Reader's Guide to Essential Criticism* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 71–2.
[16] Andrew Smith, *Gothic Literature* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 114.

in, thereby inviting degeneration into the English body.[17] But is this a case of someone unwittingly welcoming disaster when it is knocking at the door, or is the danger already present in the house? Lucy is described by Spencer as vulnerable to Dracula because she displays certain signs, but could it be that these signs are symptoms of degeneration already working in Lucy's body? Lucy has been sleepwalking since her childhood, and, tellingly enough, her father used to walk in his sleep as well. If sleepwalking denotes a certain sexual 'looseness,' as Spencer claims,[18] then this moral flaw is something she has inherited from her father. Her mother is constantly troubled by her poor health, and Lucy herself seems to have gone to Whitby in part to regain her own strength. Mina worries over the possible effects which the sleepwalking and Arthur's absence will have on Lucy, while she is thankful for Lucy's having 'lost the anæmic look which she had' (82). Later she says that Lucy is 'so sensitive that she feels influences more acutely than other people do' (97). This sensibility might be due to Lucy's natural sweetness, or it might be because of something more ominous. Highly strung nerves could be explained by both hysteria and degeneration, and Nordau lists 'extreme emotionalism' as one of the symptoms of hysteria.[19]

Renfield's history also suggests that the threat of degeneration might not be completely external. His marginal position in society as a patient in a mental institution might be enough for the readers to console themselves with the thought that he has nothing to do with them. Nevertheless, he is still English, and his illness dates from before Dracula arrives. Interestingly, in Francis Ford Coppola's *Bram Stoker's Dracula*, Renfield is actually the first clerk appointed to Count Dracula from Mr Hawkins's firm, making it probable that Renfield has in fact gone through exactly the same ordeal as Harker and that this is what has made him ill.[20] In this way, Coppola's version externalises degeneration even more than is the case in Stoker's text, because in the former, even mental disorders are seen to be Dracula's fault.

Part of the intention, and also the effect, of *Degeneration* was the medicalisation of the so-called *fin-de-siècle* frame of mind and the highlighting of the supposed connection between it and degeneration and/or hysteria.[21] In addition to the other parts of *Dracula* influenced by degeneration discourse, it is therefore fitting that someone in Stoker's novel should be mentally ill. Contrary to what takes place in Coppola's vision, though, the illness of Stoker's Renfield is not directly attributed to Dracula, although it intensifies when he senses

[17] Spencer, 'Purity and Danger,' 210.
[18] Spencer, 'Purity and Danger,' 210.
[19] Nordau, *Degeneration*, 25.
[20] *Bram Stoker's Dracula*, directed by Francis Ford Coppola (Culver City, California: Columbia Pictures, 1992), VHS.
[21] Söder, 'Disease and Health,' 478.

Dracula's presence, and he claims to have 'worshipped [Dracula] long and afar off' (113). Some kind of mental contact between Renfield and Dracula must have been in effect to make this possible. It is plausible that Renfield's illness has made his mind open to outside influences, so to speak, in the same way that Lucy makes her body available to Dracula by walking in her sleep. The similarity between Renfield's theories about blood ('[t]he blood is the life' (152)) and actual vampirism suggests that Renfield has either communicated with Dracula and received these ideas from him, or possibly seen the true nature of Dracula in some kind of vision or dream and drawn his own conclusions from this. It could also be that he has developed these theories on his own and is naturally drawn towards Dracula because he realises that the existence of vampires is evidence for his own hypotheses.

The spread of degeneration is illustrated in similar ways by Nordau and Stoker. Nordau refers to Bénédict Morel and notes that in Morel's view, degeneracy can often be traced to poisoning.[22] There is something very reminiscent of this about the fog that rolls over Whitby at Dracula's arrival, or the mist which so insidiously works its way into Mina's bed chamber. Dracula is not only a monster of flesh and blood that can be killed; he is also threatening the English through the very air they breathe. In this way, *Dracula* illustrates the perplexity and unease which many late Victorians felt about the idea of degeneracy. The mist is vague and ethereal; it finds its own way and cannot be grasped or fought. By the end of the novel, though, Dracula is sent scurrying home to Transylvania, taking his noxious fumes with him. Because he is pictured as a physical being with power over the non-physical, it is possible for the heroes to eradicate both the substantial and the insubstantial threat by destroying its corporeal form.

Dracula is not the only source of poisonous vapour in the novel, however. Dr Seward, in one small moment of peace, stands looking at 'the wonderful smoky beauty of a sunset over London, with its lurid lights and inky shadows and all the marvellous tints that come on foul clouds even as on foul water' (126). This is not a London that Dracula has made; this is London in its normal state at the time. As Pick shows, there was anxious debate about the possible effects of the London environment on the city's inhabitants:

> Darwin it seemed to many had been too optimistic, had suggested, despite his relative caution in extrapolating from the biological to the political, that evolution and progress were tied together. He had thought too little about who and what might best survive in an arguably noxious and degenerate environment – late nineteenth-century London, for instance.[23]

[22] Nordau, *Degeneration*, 35.
[23] Pick, 'Terrors of the Night,' 81.

Indeed, what might? Nordau draws the connection between degeneration and living in the city: 'The inhabitant of a large town […] is continually exposed to unfavourable influences which diminish his vital powers far more than what is inevitable.'[24] The London teeming with people that Dracula wishes to explore and exploit is in fact already polluted – and continues to be so after his death. For the city dwellers to adapt to their poisonous environment would take a very long time, and the damages inflicted on humanity in the meantime might turn out to be irreparable.

Of the vampire hunters, it is supposedly Mina who is infected by degeneration. 'I am not as you are,' she says to the rest of the group. 'There is a poison in my blood, in my soul, which may destroy me' (351). It is she who has the mark of the unclean on her forehead. Yet she still takes on an active role; she is not troubled by indecision or 'disinclination to action.'[25] While she has her understandable moments of wavering, she is still the one who manages to keep a more or less clear head and is able to see what needs to be done. Harker, however, in one night changes from a healthy, brown-haired man into 'a drawn, haggard old man' with white hair (321). While Mina has the blood of Dracula in her veins, Jonathan is the one displaying signs of degeneration. The other men even feel sorry for *him* because of what *he* is going through. The death of Dracula seems to cleanse them both, though, and they are able to produce a boy who will hopefully inherit their faith and courage.

One cannot truly be sure, however, if the taint has gone completely from Mina's blood, and the question remains whether it is passed on in her son. If so, it could mean that Dracula's blood is carried on in the English middle class. It is even possible, as Hughes suggests, to turn the whole matter on its head and see Dracula's blood as an evolutionary *gain*.[26] Dracula is, after all, of a 'great and noble race' (256), and maybe his blood is exactly what is needed in order to further the evolutionary progress of the English. It is also a point to consider, as Jennifer Wicke does, that Quincey not only shares Dracula's blood through Mina, but also the blood of his victims, most notably Lucy, and through her the blood of all the four men who opened their veins to save her.[27] Thus infused with the greatest both the East and the West can produce, he truly becomes the future hope of the English people.

[24] Nordau, *Degeneration*, 35.
[25] Nordau, *Degeneration*, 20.
[26] Hughes, *Dracula: A Reader's Guide to Essential Criticism*, 71.
[27] Jennifer Wicke, 'Vampiric Typewriting: *Dracula* and its Media,' *ELH* 59, no. 2 (1992): 491.

3.2 Conflicting Worldviews

Max Nordau claimed that degeneration in the late-Victorian population was caused by the stress and fatigue of modern living: 'Its own discoveries and progress have taken civilized humanity by surprise. It has had no time to adapt itself to its changed conditions of life.'[28] According to evolutionary theory, it would take an organism numerous generations to adapt to a new or changed environment, and in Nordau's view it was practically inevitable that humans would struggle to acclimatise to all the changes of the nineteenth century. He judged this to be a temporary setback only, however, and called upon people to fight the forces of degeneration. The true degenerates (as for example Dracula) would eventually die out, but their followers, like Mina and Lucy, could still be saved. Nordau's message that it was 'the sacred duty of all healthy and moral men to take part in the work of protecting and saving those who are not already too deeply diseased' could almost be taken as the general motto of *Dracula*. [29]

As Hughes notes, the structure of *Dracula* is that of a case, both medical and legal, and in the novel, the medical profession is heavily involved in the fight against the vampire.[30] Out of the group of five men and one woman standing against Dracula, two are medical doctors. A narrative of disease and disorder, especially of mental illness, runs through the novel. Dracula's connection with Renfield has already been noted, as has the vampiric nature of Renfield's 'zoophagy.' Because the modern, educated characters of nineteenth-century England initially find the existence of vampires unfathomable, they are forced to confront their own conception of the world, and this re-evaluation of reality at the same time necessitates a continual assessment of their own mental health. In Dracula's castle, Jonathan tells himself sternly that 'imagination must not run riot with me' (32) and begs God to preserve his sanity. Dr Seward wonders if his 'long habit of life amongst the insane is beginning to tell upon [his] own brain' (145), and he later muses that 'I sometimes think we must all be mad and that we shall wake to sanity in strait-waistcoats' (292). Even Van Helsing has his moments of doubting himself, while in the end concluding that 'I am at least sane. Thank God for that mercy at all events, though the proving it has been dreadful' (392). Hughes sees the compulsive information gathering of the novel's characters, and the subsequent presentation of the collected material to the reader, as an anticipation of the

[28] Nordau, *Degeneration*, 40.
[29] Nordau, *Degeneration*, 557.
[30] William Hughes, *Bram Stoker's 'Dracula': A Reader's Guide* (London: Continuum, 2009), 17.

psychologists' 'talking cure,'[31] while Wicke draws the comparison between Freud's treatment of his patients and Van Helsing's hypnotising Mina.[32] Renfield's need for psychiatric treatment is obvious, but he has his lucid moments, such as when he seems to comprehend what is happening better than the characters with medical degrees. What it means to be mentally ill becomes unclear when patients understand more than doctors and the doctors are busily treating themselves and each other. While medical men are given a prominent part, they are, as we can see, by no means presented as infallible. Stoker uses the solidity of the profession's reputation to give his characters credibility, and then he uses his characters to question the profession.

Rationality is seen as important to the vampire hunters, and it becomes invaluable in defeating the Count. It has its limits, though, or, rather, accepted knowledge has its limits. Seward in particular has his worldview challenged by Van Helsing when he refuses to believe his own eyes in diagnosing Lucy. '[Y]ou are too prejudiced,' Van Helsing tells him. 'You do not let your eyes see nor your ears hear, and that which is outside your daily life is of no account to you. Do you not think that there are things which you cannot understand, and yet which are; that some people see things others cannot?' (204). The essence of Van Helsing's subsequent speech is that when practices and beliefs which are now regarded as scientifically based earlier were seen as witchcraft, it is extremely probable that people now dismiss as mystical or superstitious phenomena what will sometime in the future acquire a scientific explanation. Rosemary Jann sees this conflict between the accepted, presumably rational, 'truths' of established science and other more spiritually inclined points of view as central to the time period and also to *Dracula* itself:

> Even some who no longer accepted Christian dogma criticized as inadequate science's claim to establish empirical methods as the sole standard for truth. The late nineteenth-century interest in parapsychology, spiritualism, theosophy, and the fourth dimension was in part motivated by attempts to reconcile science and spirit by finding empirical proofs for spiritual life or to refute materialism by expanding the boundaries of the real beyond the merely physical. Stoker's *Dracula* explicitly positions itself in line with these reactions against a simplistically conceived materialism.[33]

Seward does not immediately admit to believing in any of Van Helsing's examples except for hypnotism, which he acknowledges because 'Charcot has proved that pretty well' (204). But hypnotism was in itself based on mesmerism, a technique often used and championed by

[31] Hughes, *Dracula: A Reader's Guide*, 41.
[32] Wicke, 'Vampiric Typewriting,' 485.
[33] Rosemary Jann, 'Saved by Science? The Mixed Messages of Bram Stoker's *Dracula*,' *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 31, no. 2 (1989): 274.

practitioners who by this time were regarded as little more than quacks. As Van Helsing asks Seward, when hypnotism has achieved respectability, why not also thought reading? As the plot develops, the chance of eventually catching and destroying the Count hinges exactly on Mina's reading his mind – while she is appropriately being kept under a hypnotic trance that Van Helsing has induced. Catherine Wynne even sees Dracula and Van Helsing's many attempts of thought reading and mind control as 'a battle for the control of mesmerism, wresting it back from its occultist associations and retrieving it for science.'[34] Van Helsing, then, becomes the person who tries 'to reconcile science and spirit.' He shows us how mesmerism is supposed to be used – clinically, with consent, and without trying to change the person under trance. The vampires, meanwhile, drag mesmerism and its reputation down with them into a mire of superstition, pseudo-science, and occultism. In a sense, they validate Seward's view that some things cannot be seriously considered by people of science, because by being affiliated with vampires, thought control becomes just one more of their supernatural abilities. The only reason Seward believes in hypnotism at all is, as we have seen, that he accepts the results of Charcot's experiments. Van Helsing sees mesmerism as something neutral and (with the assistance of and encouragement from Mina) uses it on the side of science and rationality.

Van Helsing's 'absolutely open mind' (122) enables him to understand Lucy's situation when everyone else (and especially Seward) is still baffled. Seward looks at the marks on her throat and entertains the thought that her blood has been drained that way, but 'abandon[s] the idea as soon as formed, for such a thing [can]not be' (134). When the evidence in front of him goes against his perception of the world, he dismisses the evidence. He becomes an example of how narrow-minded scientists risk becoming if they only acknowledge what is already the accepted truth and never go on to try and discover something new or venture to look outside their own area of expertise. Van Helsing, however, attempts to give a natural explanation for Dracula's existence. He says that 'all the forces of nature that are occult and deep and strong must have worked together in some wondrous way' (340). In medical language, 'occult' means simply 'hidden,' and we understand by his comment that he refers not to something 'supernatural,' but to something that can be examined and analysed; it just has not been so yet. He goes on to describe how even the geological and chemical peculiarities of the Count's homeland must have attributed to his powers. Instead of complaining that the evidence does not make sense, he (and Mina with him) searches for

[34] Catherine Wynne, 'Mesmeric Exorcism, Idolatrous Beliefs, and Bloody Rituals: Mesmerism, Catholicism, and Second Sight in Bram Stoker's Fiction,' *Victorian Review* 26, no. 1 (2000): 47.

more evidence, analyses what he finds, and formulates his theory based on his conclusions. In this way, even though Van Helsing is a devout Catholic and also not above consulting other beliefs or superstitions, he still becomes the 'best' scientist in the novel, because he does not allow prejudice to cloud his judgement.[35]

From the start, the novel proposes an opposition between Protestant, rational England and a superstitious and mysterious Eastern Europe. Jonathan Harker has read that 'every known superstition in the world is gathered into the horseshoe of the Carpathians, as if it were the centre of some sort of imaginative whirlpool' (8), and as he travels further into the country, there are examples of superstitious practices everywhere. People make the sign against the evil eye, talk about witches and vampires, kneel in front of shrines, or follow blue flames into the forest to look for treasure. The Count tells him that '[w]e are in Transylvania; and Transylvania is not England. Our ways are not your ways, and there shall be to you many strange things' (28), and Harker feels himself 'all in a sea of wonders' (25). The reader is in a sense asked to accept the fantastical things that happen to Jonathan exactly because the setting is Transylvania, not England. This neat dividing of the world, into places where supernatural phenomena can plausibly occur and where they cannot, crumbles when we learn of the Count's intention: 'I long to go through the crowded streets of your mighty London, to be in the midst of the whirl and rush of humanity, to share its life, its change, its death, and all that makes it what it is' (27). While superstition in the novel so far has been partitioned off to the dark mountains of a practically medieval Romania, the Count, as the nexus of many of these superstitious practices, or even as '*superstition itself*,' as Christopher Herbert suggests,[36] necessarily blurs these boundaries when he goes to England.

When monsters suddenly appear in the midst of modern London, the question of what superstition really is becomes immediate. Harker has already learnt that only because something is usually thought of as a part of folklore does not mean it is not real; now the time comes for the other characters to go through the same process. Can something be said to be superstition if it manifestly exists? What about the weapons used against it? Van Helsing, contrary to the other characters, immediately understands how limiting it would be to fight a vampire as you would a human being. All tools available must be used, in his view, and if 'all [they] have to go upon are traditions and superstitions,' then that is the basis on which they will plan their strategy (254). Soon after, they are off to search for 'witch and demon cures' in

[35] Except for when it comes to women. This will be discussed in the part called 'Men's Brains and Women's Hearts.'
[36] Christopher Herbert, 'Vampire Religion,' *Representations* 70, no. 1 (2002): 101. The italics are the author's.

the British Museum (292). We can see how far the 'modern' characters have come in a scene near the end, where the captain of the ship bringing Dracula's box from England to Galatz dismisses his Romanian men's aversion to the box with 'the supersteetion of foreigners is pairfectly rideeculous!' (370). The sentiment is the same as Jonathan's when embarking upon his first journey to the East, if delivered a little differently. Jonathan and the other vampire hunters have learnt since then what the Captain has not: sometimes what you think of as superstition is only a phenomenon you have not yet encountered. They know the evil nature of the box's contents, and the Captain, in contrast, is made to look a little foolish in his ignorance.

The novel is full of Christian references or symbols. The characters pray to God, use Christian artefacts and terminology, and practise conventional, modified, or subverted Christian rituals. For Van Helsing, the whole quest to destroy the vampire is seen in religious terms, with the vampire hunters as Knights Templar: 'Thus are we ministers of God's own wish: that the world, and men for whom His Son die, will not be given over to monsters, whose very existence would defame Him. He have allowed us to redeem one soul already, and we go out as the old knights of the Cross to redeem more' (340–41). To him, the vampire defies the will of God. Not only does the vampire kill people before their time; it poisons them so that their souls become tainted and separated from God's mercy. By denying its victims a true death, the vampire also denies them the possibility of moving on into an afterlife. By rising from the grave, it mocks the resurrection of Christ. In fact, Van Helsing calls vampires 'an arrow in the side of Him who died for man' (253). If humans are to continue existing as 'Un-Dead,' Christ's sacrifice becomes meaningless. The other vampire hunters are initially somewhat embarrassed by Van Helsing's earnestness, but they soon accept his leadership and his judgement. Jonathan tells himself that 'faith is our only anchor' (330), and Mina comforts him with the thought that 'perhaps [they] are the instruments of ultimate good' (336). Just before going to the Count's castle, she writes that '[w]e are truly in the hands of God' (383). Because they are aware of the threat the vampire poses, they see it as their responsibility as Christians to fight it, and they trust God to help them.

The English characters initially conflate Catholicism with superstition. When Jonathan is given a crucifix on his way to Dracula's castle, '[he does] not know what to do, for as an English Churchman, [he has] been taught to regard such things as in some measure idolatrous' (11). Lucy's suitors react in much the same way when they learn that Van Helsing uses the Host to close Lucy's tomb. They recognise his good intent, however, and instead of lessening him in their eyes, his devotion becomes a proof of his sincerity – and of how serious he judges

the situation to be: 'It was an answer that appalled the most sceptical of us, and we felt individually that in the presence of such earnest purpose as the Professor's, a purpose which could thus use the to him most sacred of things, it was impossible to distrust' (224). Jonathan himself has not been Dracula's guest for long before he starts to wonder '[w]hat meant the giving of the crucifix, of the garlic, of the wild rose, of the mountain ash? … It is odd that a thing which I have been taught to regard with disfavour and as idolatrous should in a time of loneliness and trouble be of help' (35). Van Helsing acts the role of the Catholic priest and in some ways even of the exorcist. Wynne points out that Renfield's illness can be read as demonic possession and that his 'confession' to Van Helsing signals his final salvation.[37] The vampires are also seen to be at peace after being cleansed of the evil – the demon? – within them. The Catholicism initially regarded as 'other' and, if not suspicious, then at least a little ridiculous, becomes accepted and respected during the course of the novel. Through Van Helsing, the mainly non-Catholic, English, contemporary readership of the novel became acquainted with and learned in part to respect Catholic symbols.

Herbert draws attention to the somewhat surprising fact that religion and science appear to be on the same side in this novel, allied against the forces of darkness.[38] Whatever the 'real' nature of the vampire, a demon from hell or an aberration of nature, it is evidently so dangerous that any differences of opinion between scientific and religious thought must be put on hold during the fight. As we have seen, even superstition is consulted. '[T]o superstition must we trust at the first,' Van Helsing says. 'It was man's faith in the early, and it have its root in faith still' (348). A continuing argument of the narrative, vocalised particularly by Van Helsing, is that all three forces, science, religion, *and* superstition, are required in the fight against evil. The mesmerism in which Seward doubts, the English characters' nods to Protestantism, and Van Helsing's Catholicism are ostensibly all needed, together with modern science and technology. In terms of what actually happens in the novel, this is not necessarily true. While there is much religious talk surrounding the chase of Dracula, and the vampires are seen to react negatively to certain Christian symbols such as the crucifix or the Host, their actual dispatch is effectuated by more secular means: Lucy is staked, and the Count is killed with a knife. Jann argues that while *Dracula*, especially through Van Helsing, seems to illustrate the necessity of an opening up, so to speak, of the scientific mind, it is still precisely the rationality of this mind that makes Van Helsing's group able to defeat the vampires: 'Stoker may suggest that the reality of the supernatural exposes

[37] Wynne, 'Mesmeric Exorcism,' 54.
[38] Herbert, 'Vampire Religion,' 101.

the limitations of materialist science, but he ultimately lines up on the side of this science's truth-finding methods.'[39] Herbert notes how the religious and the superstitious practices in the novel 'tend to collapse into one another,'[40] and tentatively proposes that Dracula can be read as representing religion itself.[41] Contemporary anthropological thought suggested that religion could be read in evolutionary terms, with so-called 'primitive' religions at one end and modern Christianity at the other. Outlining the similarities between the Christianity presented in *Dracula* and these 'primitive' beliefs, Herbert suggests seeing the novel as 'defining superstition not as the evolutionary predecessor of religion, but, rather, as an outgrowth of it.'[42] Christianity might be said to have its roots in older religions, but in the novel it also lays the basis for both vampirism and superstition. If the natural, evolutionary, outcome of religious thought is vampirism, then the characters will fight it in much the same manner as degeneration – with rationality, bravery, and common sense.

3.3 Men's Brains and Women's Hearts

While Van Helsing chooses to read the mission to destroy the vampires in Christian terms, there is always a more immediate reason for the men to get involved – a reason concerning a woman. First they have to save Lucy (and her victims) from eternal damnation, and then they have to prevent Mina from ending up as Lucy. It is perhaps natural that Van Helsing should appeal to the feelings of Lucy's suitors in trying to enlist their help, but the same dynamics are carried over in their relationship with Mina: the men go out to fight because they want first to protect and then to save a woman whom they all hold in high regard. Van Helsing tells Mina that she 'must be our star and our hope' (258). The Count himself puts words to one of their central concerns when he brags that '[y]our girls that you all love are mine already; and through them you and others shall yet be mine' (326). The women are the ones the men fight *for*, but they are also the ones through whom Dracula can achieve a foothold in England. Sometimes they themselves have to be fought in order to be saved. They are, basically, the weakest links in the chain. This pattern – of women simultaneously being weak or even dangerous *and* someone whom you, as a man, should cherish – is present throughout *Dracula*, and can be seen in the scientific debate of the time as well.

Picking up on the thinking of Darwin and others, the craniologist Carl Vogt began placing his work in an evolutionary context in the 1860s. By measuring the size and weight of

[39] Jann, 'Saved by Science?,' 283.
[40] Herbert, 'Vampire Religion,' 104.
[41] Herbert, 'Vampire Religion,' 111.
[42] Herbert, 'Vampire Religion,' 112.

human skulls, he claimed to be able to determine how far the people to whom the skulls belonged had progressed on the evolutionary ladder. Caucasian men, with the largest skulls and the heaviest brains, were judged to be at the top. Caucasian women and others with smaller skulls, such as some people of colour, were consequently seen as naturally inferior.[43] Van Helsing's referring to Mina's brain as 'man's brain' (250) or 'her great brain which is trained like man's brain' (361) tells us both that her brain is worthy of admiration *and* that it is somehow unnatural. As Wicke explains,

> Mina is an anomaly in evolutionary terms, and as such is affiliated to Dracula; her brain is not a female one, but instead is white, male and European … On that evolutionary scale the female brain, the criminal brain and the so-called savage or primitive brain are on a par; the adult white male brain is the evolutionary summit. By leaping over this divide Mina occupies unclear territory, and one way of reading what happens to her is to assume that she is set up as Dracula's next victim as a means of establishing her femininity.[44]

While Mina's 'anomalous' brain is an asset in the vampire hunt, the other characters still consistently draw attention to how unusual she is every time she demonstrates her intelligence. Perhaps the only thing that would convince the readers – and the other characters – of her womanhood in spite of her 'masculine' brain is for her to become penetrated by a vampire.

Van Helsing is given much credence in the novel. He is a doctor several times over, and in fact has so many letters after his name that the chronicler of the narrative does not bother with writing them all, referring to him as 'Abraham Van Helsing, M. D., D. PH., D. LIT., etc., etc.' (123). The point is in any case made, and Seward calls him 'one of the most advanced scientists of his day' (122). Without Van Helsing's expertise, Lucy's death would have marked the beginning of England's descent into vampirism. The readers (and the other characters) thus become disposed to listen to his point of view. When Stoker goes to these lengths to establish one character as the 'expert,' it is therefore of particular importance to pay attention to what that character actually says. Interestingly, much of his comments are not directly related to the vampires, but rather to the relationship between the sexes or the essential nature of men and women. Through him the reader is presented with a view of 'masculine' and 'feminine' abilities as innate and natural. Men are connected with bravery and strength, while women are praised for their sweetness and beauty. He tells Mina that '[w]e are men, and are able to bear' (258), while she as a woman is too fragile to be included in the fight. He expresses surprise over Mina's memory, saying '[a]h, then you have good

[43] Dijkstra, *Idols of Perversity*, 166–7.
[44] Wicke, 'Vampiric Typewriting,' 484.

memory for facts, for details? It is not always so with young ladies' (195). When Lucy dares to grimace at his bunches of garlic, he tells her not to snub her nose at him, or 'I shall point out to my friend Arthur what woes he may have to endure in seeing so much beauty that he so loves so much distort' (140), as if Lucy's beauty were the most important part of her character. The difference is even present in the blood: 'A brave man's blood is the best thing on this earth when a woman is in trouble' (160), Van Helsing says after helplessly expecting Lucy to die, because he decided he could not trust her female servants and ask one of them for a blood donation.

A particularly interesting pattern in *Dracula* shows up in the way the characters invest so much energy in talking about how men and women 'are' and how they should behave, while at the same time acting out the opposite. Van Helsing, to Seward's baffled surprise, breaks down in a fit of laughing and crying after Lucy's funeral, 'just as a woman does' (186). Mina, in addition to continually demonstrating the abilities of her 'man's brain,' travels off alone to a foreign country at the first sign of her fiancé's being in trouble. At one of the meetings in London, '[s]he [clings] to her husband's arm, and [holds] it tight as though *her* clinging could protect *him* from any harm that might come' (328, my italics). When *she* has been violated by the Count, she entreats her husband to 'be brave and strong, and help me through the horrible task' of telling the others what has happened (305). All in all, Jonathan Harker displays for at least half of the novel a passive, reactive attitude that only is negated, if it is at all, with his thrusting his knife into Dracula's breast at the end. As pointed out by Wicke above, Mina's vampirical infection might be seen as a way of putting her back in her place as a woman. Jonathan's transformation from would-be vampire victim to vampire killer could likewise be read as his way of claiming or re-claiming his masculinity.

With the white man as the supposedly finest result of evolution yet, it was seen as natural by scientists such as Joseph Le Conte that any further progress would continue in the same direction.[45] Operating from the hypothesis that men and women once were much more like each other, perhaps even the same, hermaphroditic, bisexual being, and that evolution then had taken them in different directions, men to be masculine and women to be feminine, any deviancy from the 'proper' gender roles were seen as a sign of regression.[46] If men and women had developed in different ways, the reasoning went, they were not supposed to be similar; they were, in fact, meant to evolve each to their own extreme. Conflating masculine or male with the cerebral and feminine or female with the natural and the animalistic, nature,

[45] Dijkstra, *Idols of Perversity*, 216.
[46] Dijkstra, *Idols of Perversity*, 212–13.

especially when seen as Mother Nature, was considered at best a distraction from and at worst an enemy of the on-going evolution of man into a higher, transcendent form of being.[47]

By continually referring to Mina's or Lucy's 'womanly' characteristics, his appreciation of the 'manly' strength of his comrades, and his determination to keep Mina out of the action, Van Helsing upholds this splitting of men and women into two almost completely different beings. Dr Seward, as the other scientist in the novel, does not seem to disagree with him in any of this, and Mina herself rivals Van Helsing in gender essentialism with her frequent remarks upon the maternal nature of women or the bravery of men. After Lucy's death, her fiancé is not allowed to properly express his grief until Mina lends him a shoulder on which to cry. 'I suppose there is something in woman's nature that makes a man free to break down before her and express his feelings on the tender or emotional side without feeling it derogatory to his manhood,' she writes in her journal afterwards (244). This notion of what is proper or natural for men and women puts her in a difficult position when Van Helsing wants to exclude her from the fight. She wants to be a part of the group; she knows she has skills and abilities that could be valuable, and she does not want to be separated from her husband, whose work she has always been eager to support. Faced with the argument that the fight will be more difficult if the men are to worry about her in the middle of it as well, '[she] c[an] say nothing, save to accept their chivalrous care for [her]' (258).

Van Helsing's decision to keep Mina out of things is partly explainable in terms of his wanting to protect her and keep her safe. At the same time, this is reliant upon a particular train of contemporary psychiatric thought. It soon becomes clear that what the medical men in the novel fear will happen to Mina if she were allowed to participate in the vampire hunt is not that she would be harmed by the vampires (something which ironically happens as a direct result of their shutting her out of the group), but that her nerves would not be able to take the excitement. Firmly believing in the innate differences between men and women, many psychiatrists of the time thought that if a woman were to act outside of her 'natural' role as wife and mother, it would invariably tax her strength even to the point of mental breakdown.[48] 'Things are quite bad enough to us, all men of the world, and who have been in many tight places in our time,' Dr Seward says, 'but it is no place for a woman, and if she had remained in touch with the affair, it would in time infallibly have wrecked her' (273). Mina's enforced inactivity and ignorance is chillingly reminiscent of the rest cures psychiatrists prescribed for

[47] Dijkstra, *Idols of Perversity*, 217.
[48] Elaine Showalter, *The Female Malady: Women, Madness and English Culture, 1830–1980* (1985; repr., London: Virago, 2009), 123.

hysterics and neurasthenics, which allowed the patients practically no contact with the outside world and discouraged them from any form of mental (and physical) activity whatsoever.[49] Mina is not only kept out of the action and the planning; she is not even allowed to know what the men are or have been doing to stop the vampire. She is to be kept entirely ignorant, something which bothers her husband, because he is used to telling her everything. Unable to express his unease in front of not only one, but two medical doctors (as well as a lord and a rich Texan), Harker eventually comes over to their way of thinking. This facilitates what Hughes recognises as one of the novel's crucial instances of misdiagnosis.[50] Having accepted Van Helsing's medical expertise, Harker takes Mina's worsened looks as proof of her faltering spirit: 'She looks paler now. … It is too great a strain for a woman to bear. I did not think so at first, but I know better now' (270). It does not even cross his mind that there are other reasons why people might be pale when there is a vampire about. Mina is fittingly cooped up in a mental hospital while the men go out to hunt, and it takes the words of a patient (Renfield) for them to realise how dangerous this is.

Van Helsing's misreading of the situation and of the place of women, and Mina in particular, leads directly to her violation by the Count. It would seem as if Mina's ordeal is not so much punishment for her 'unwomanly' ways as a lesson for Van Helsing and the other men. 'We want here no more concealments,' Van Helsing says after the attack. 'Our hope now is in knowing all' (304). But it is too late, because while the men are now ready to accept Mina as part of the group, her connection with the Count makes it necessary for her to once more be kept in the dark, so that he does not learn of their plans. Van Helsing and Dracula's intentions might differ, but the effect of their actions are the same: Mina is refused a place alongside the men.

If Van Helsing, who is given so much authority in the novel, is mistaken in his assessment of the nature of women, is there anyone else who is seen to gain more credence within the novel? Are there other views on how a woman should be, and is any of them seen as conclusive? We are at least quickly assured of what a woman is *not*: the three vampire women in Dracula's castle show 'a deliberate voluptuousness which [is] both thrilling and repulsive' (45). Their sexual aggressiveness represents something new to Jonathan, and he does not really know how to handle it. Their true nature is soon apparent, though, in the description of one of them 'lick[ing] her lips like an animal' (45). Their obvious lust makes them mindless beasts who have lost even one of the most basic characteristics attributed to

[49] Showalter, *The Female Malady*, 138–9.
[50] Hughes, *Dracula: A Reader's Guide*, 48.

women – the maternal instinct. Not only do they openly express and act upon sexual urges; they actually eat children. Jonathan passes his judgement on them later on when he catches himself thinking of them as women: 'Faugh! Mina is a woman, and there is naught in common. They are devils of the Pit!' (61). Sally Ledger reads the three vampire women, as well as Lucy, as representations of the 'sexually decadent' New Woman of the 1890s.[51] As mentioned, it is possible to discuss whether Lucy's air of sexual availability is brought on by the vampire blood or if it has been there all the time. Ledger, for one, takes Lucy's outburst to Mina over why she cannot marry three men, 'or as many as want her' (67), as a sign of a promiscuously inclined personality.[52] Stephanie Demetrakopoulos, on the other hand, reads Lucy another way. In her view, Lucy is a nostalgic reminder of the so-called 'Womanly Woman' of the 1850s, while Mina is the competent, modern – and admirable – 1890s New Woman.[53]

It is true that Mina in many ways is the epitome of modern efficiency, but does this make her a New Woman? If a New Woman had to be openly sexual, then no, but this was not necessarily the case. Some preferred celibacy and even used it as a political tool.[54] Mina's going out to work before her marriage might be seen as a sign of wanting independence, but references to her and Jonathan's backgrounds make it clear that this was out of necessity. As much as Mina enjoys working and learning new things, she always justifies her initiative with the thought that it might be useful to her husband (or one of the other male characters). She learns stenography to be able to help him in his work, and she continually thinks of new ways in which she can contribute to the men's catching Dracula. She is the perfect assistant, the perfect secretary. It turns out that what Van Helsing does wrong is to deny her fulfilling this role of her husband's helpmeet or companion. Mina and Jonathan have always depended upon each other for everything, but after Van Helsing's, and later Dracula's, intervention, a wedge is driven between them. Jonathan feels 'that from that instant a door had been shut between us' (347). Instead of seeing Mina as a New Woman convinced of her rights to knowledge and freedom, one can, in Ledger's words, read her as 'a modernised version of the "angel in the house."'[55] Her seemingly 'unfeminine' mental strength and her 'man's brain' do not appear so threatening or even degenerated if their purpose is to serve her husband and, later, her

[51] Sally Ledger, *The New Woman: Fiction and Feminism at the Fin de Siècle* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), 101–2.
[52] Ledger, *The New Woman*, 101.
[53] Stephanie Demetrakopoulos, 'Feminism, Sex Role Exchanges, and Other Subliminal Fantasies in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*,' *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 2, no. 3 (1977): 108–9.
[54] Showalter, Elaine, *Sexual Anarchy: Gender and Culture at the Fin de Siècle* (1991; repr., London: Virago, 1995), 22.
[55] Ledger, *The New Woman*, 106.

children. By the end of the novel, all the infected women are cleansed; Dracula is destroyed, and Jonathan and Mina are as one again in their up-to-date, *fin-de-siècle* version of a conventional Victorian marriage.

3.4 The Nature of Vampires

Is a vampire always a representation of something else? By asking this question, Nicholas Daly wants to question the allegorical reading of the vampire that he finds so common in *Dracula* criticism.[56] In becoming preoccupied with trying to decode what the vampire *really* stands for, whether it is degeneration, gender non-conformity, or something else, he thinks critics are in danger of reading the novel as somehow standing outside history, because it is seen as a product, a reflection, of its own and of its writer's history. Seeing the novel as a mirror held up to society thus denies it the possibility of existing in and influencing that society. If it is to be an allegory of anything, Daly suggests that it is an allegory of the future instead of the past, because he prefers to see the text as 'providing a cultural narrative that reshapes society rather than mirroring social anxieties.'[57] Even though I have read *Dracula* exactly in light of the anxieties noted by Daly, I do not mean to see it only as one of Jonathan's Kodak snapshots of its time. The novel is still a vampire story, even if you choose to read the vampire as signifying certain things. Moreover, it is a vampire story that has influenced a hundred years of vampire art and culture, in addition to the modernist influence emphasised by Daly. If we want to read the novel as being thoroughly *in* culture, as Daly seems to desire, then surely we need to take its past and present into account *as well as* its future. Even if a vampire is intended to be just a vampire, it can still function as both a vampire and a symbol or a reflection.

Nordau's *Degeneration* was well received by some because it made supposed degenerates easily identifiable.[58] While the same black-and-white mentality seems to dominate in *Dracula*, once we get underneath the surface, things are not quite so clear. 'All men are mad in some way or the other,' Dr Van Helsing at one point notes (129). By availing himself of degeneration theory in creating a nightmare, Stoker, at least indirectly, contributed to contemporary discourse about degeneration. Degeneration might threaten the English body from the outside, but it may also already be present within it. If we follow Nordau's descriptions of the degenerate, we recognise symptoms in more than one of the main

[56] Nicholas Daly, 'Incorporated Bodies: *Dracula* and the Rise of Professionalism.' *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 39, no. 2 (1997): 184.
[57] Daly, 'Incorporated Bodies,' 185.
[58] Söder, 'Disease and Health,' 475.

characters of *Dracula*, and it is not always clear who is affected or to what degree. New technology and new ways for men and women to interact further complicate the situation. The continuous, dangerous atmosphere of the city gives degeneration ample breeding ground, and the shifting borders between reality and fantasy, religion and superstition, also make the characters doubt themselves. This uncertainty as to who is degenerate and who is not, and what degeneration really is, in its own way captures the *fin-de-siècle* frame of mind.

4 'The Eternal Riddle': Mona Caird and *The Daughters of Danaus*

> But I believe myself that all this unrest and rebellion
> against the old established abuses amongst women
> is simply an effort of nature to improve the race.
> The men of the present day will have a bad time of it
> if they resist the onward impulse;
> but, in any case, the men of the future
> will have good reason to arise and call their mothers blessed.[1]
>
> Perhaps women are not altogether animals after all.
> The thought is startling, I know. Try to face it.[2]

The so-called New Woman of the late-nineteenth century was not limited to supporting roles in male-driven narratives such as Lucy and Mina in *Dracula*. During the first half of the 1890s, the literary interest in these women became so prolific that New Woman fiction became a genre in its own right. Feminists such as Mona Caird used the genre to explore women's lives and the conditions that ruled them, and New Women writers frequently made use of evolutionary language and arguments to explain their characters' – and by extension, Victorian women's – need for change. In the case of Caird, a scientific understanding of the universe is central to her works. By arguing from a scientifically based position, she tries to make readers of both her fiction and her non-fiction understand that the situation of contemporary women is not only illogical but also directly harmful to the human race. In her novel *The Daughters of Danaus* (1894), conventions and traditions are torn down and exposed in the light of science. Through the characters' immersion in evolutionary and natural imagery and language, the reader is frequently reminded of the kind of world the characters live in and what logic it is that informs it. The characters explicitly discuss and reflect on their position in the universe, as does Hadria in this instance:

> After all, humanity was a puny production of the Ages. Men and women were like the struggling animalculæ that her father had so often shewn the boys, in a drop of magnified ditch-water; yet not quite like those microscopic insects, for the stupendous processes of life had at last created a widening consciousness, a mind which could perceive the bewildering vastness of Nature and its own smallness, which could, in some measure, get outside its own particular ditch, and the strife and struggle of it, groping upwards for larger realities. (116)

While the relative insignificance of human life and the seeming endlessness of the universe sometimes bring the characters down, as they do in *Tess*, there is also some cause for hope in

[1] Sarah Grand, *The Heavenly Twins* (New York: Cassell Publishing Company, 1893), 219.
[2] Mona Caird, *The Daughters of Danaus* (1894; repr., New York: The Feminist Press at the University of New York, 1989), 174. Further references will be in the text.

the future. The saintly Professor Fortescue is a welcome reminder that improvement is possible, and if change is not brought by sudden revolutions, it can be effected by tiny, tiny steps in the right direction.

4.1 New Women

The figure of the New Woman became something of a stock character in *fin-de-siècle* discourse. The so-called 'Woman Question' had been vigorously debated in and out of newspapers for years, and the situation for women had become slightly less grim with new and increased opportunities for work and education. New legislation such as the Married Women's Property Acts of 1870 and 1882, which acknowledged married women's right to their own property, gave women more control over their lives.[3] Bills suggesting suffrage for women were presented in Parliament practically every year from 1884.[4] These changes did not go uncontested, however, and discussions about the proper role of women abounded in the press and in the drawing room. A certain dichotomy emerged in the popular imagination, consisting of the 'real' woman, who knew her place and the sacred nature of her position as wife and (especially) mother, and the New, who disregarded everything the other held dear. Instead of acknowledging the many different people, causes, and viewpoints involved in late-nineteenth-century feminism, it seems to have been easier (and more effective) for opponents to pile them all together in the image of the New Woman.[5]

The term 'New Woman' was coined in 1894 in a couple of articles by Sarah Grand and Ouida, and it was soon picked up by the press.[6] Women who ventured even so much as a step outside normative gender roles were soon called New Women, and writers who wrote about such women produced New Women novels. Some, like Elizabeth Chapman, tried to distance themselves from the term, while others, such as Mona Caird or Sarah Grand, embraced it.[7] Mrs M. Eastwood, along with Chapman, claimed that the image of the New Woman had been constructed by the press, and that it obscured and elided the real women who were fighting for women's rights.[8] In novels such as *Jude the Obscure*, *The Odd Women*, and *The Story of a Modern Woman*, writers of the period deliberately tried to flesh out the stereotype in order to create understanding and compassion in their readers, while magazines

[3] Angelique Richardson and Chris Willis, introduction to *The New Woman in Fiction and in Fact: Fin-de-Siècle Feminisms*, ed. Angelique Richardson and Chris Willis (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 5–7.
[4] Richardson and Willis, introduction to *Fin-de-Siècle Feminisms*, 4.
[5] Richardson and Willis, introduction to *Fin-de-Siècle Feminisms*, 28.
[6] Sally Ledger, *The New Woman: Fiction and Feminism at the Fin de Siècle* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), 2.
[7] Richardson and Willis, introduction to *Fin-de-Siècle Feminisms*, 24.
[8] Richardson and Willis, introduction to *Fin-de-Siècle Feminisms*, 10.

such as *Punch* were happy to enforce it with a never-ending stream of caricatures of 'mannish' women smoking cigarettes and riding bicycles.[9] In fact, as Gail Cunningham notes, 'the New Woman provided the popular press with an endless source of amusement.'[10]

Everyone was not amused, however. Some felt threatened by the idea of the New Woman because she was thought to turn existing gender roles and conventions upside down,[11] and much of the ridicule were in fact direct attempts at shaming women back into their place (or ensuring they never went out of it). The very essence of the New Woman caricature was a woman who either tried to be or could not help being more like a man than a woman. Critics and caricaturists portrayed this as unnatural. 'He knew that this new womanhood business was only a phase,' the narrator of *The Daughters of Danaus* says of one trying dinner guest, 'but upon his word, he was tired of it. Not that he had any objection to women being well educated …, but he could *not* stand it when they went out of their sphere, and put themselves forward and tried to be emancipated, and all that sort of nonsense' (371). When women 'went out of their sphere,' confusion inevitably followed, this logic had it. Although actual Victorian society was in practice much more complex than this simple division between his and her world, the idea, or ideal, of woman's sphere was dear to many, and perhaps especially to middle-class men, who had the most to gain from its implementation and maintenance. Caird's Mr Temperley, who sees himself as holding advanced notions, still 'confesses' to Miss Du Prel that he has 'scant patience with these interfering women, who want to turn everything upside down, instead of quietly minding their duties at home' (77). The thought that women should have the same rights as men was so revolutionary that its application would 'turn everything upside down.' Mrs Fullerton feels that in the modern world, 'everything is topsy-turvy,' but as her son rightly points out, one cannot determine what is topsy-turvy until one knows 'what constitutes being right side up' (36).

Through their work, New Women writers alternately tried to make their readers aware of just how wrong society actually was and to envision a future or alternative world where things were different. They were not a unified group of activists with one common plan of campaign. They all wanted to better the position for women, but they often disagreed upon how to go about it and upon in which direction they wanted change to happen. Common for many of them, as well as for their opponents, was the use of evolutionary based terminology

[9] Richardson and Willis, introduction to *Fin-de-Siècle Feminisms*, 22–3.
[10] Gail Cunningham, *The New Woman and the Victorian Novel* (London: The Macmillan Press, 1978), 11.
[11] Ledger, *The New Woman*, 2.

and reasoning to validate and legitimate their points. At the very basis of the Woman Question lay thorny questions about the nature of what it meant to be human. Were there natural, innate differences between women and men? If so, what were these differences, and did they necessitate the present system of separate spheres? How did God or Nature intend men or women to behave, and what would the consequences be for going against that intention? Doctors claimed that New Women were damaging their health in taking up traditionally masculine pursuits,[12] while New Women thinkers such as Mona Caird claimed that the apparent frailty of many women was a result of deliberate cultivation over centuries.[13]

Characters in *The Daughters of Danaus* articulate many of the different aspects of the *fin-de-siècle* debate about the place of women. Mrs Fullerton is the traditional woman who has sacrificed everything for her family and only wants life to go on as it used to do. Henriette Temperley is the spokesperson for women's sacred role as mothers and wives and uses words such as 'holy' and 'duty' in the firm belief that this will convince her listeners that she is right (124). Lady Engleton plays at being a New Woman, liking, for example, 'to leave a question delicately balanced, enjoying all the fun of "advanced" thought without endangering her favourite sentiments' (255). Algitha clearly states what her principles are and acts accordingly. While she marries at the end of the novel, it is clear that this will be a marriage that is based on equality. For her to settle for anything less would be out of character. The tragedy of Hadria, the main character, is that she *does* settle for less, and she has to live with the consequences of this choice for the rest of her life. Caird uses Hadria's awareness of the situation and willingness to analyse it to engineer countless discussions, arguments, and confrontations in which women's role in society is thoroughly canvassed.

Valeria Du Prel occupies an odd middle position on the novel's political map in that she essentially *is* the New Woman, even the New Woman writer. She is not happy with her situation, however. She is single because she cannot in good conscience marry a man she does not love, and she writes novels in order to support herself. Because she is lonely, she sometimes wishes she had acted against her principles and settled down to have a family. While outwardly being the most 'advanced' woman in the novel, she still argues from an essentialist, biological point of view. 'A woman cannot afford to despise the dictates of Nature,' she says, bitterly. 'It does not answer to pit oneself against one's race, to bid defiance to the fundamental laws of life' (71). At the same time, she looks to Hadria to act the part of

[12] Elaine Showalter, *Sexual Anarchy: Gender and Culture at the Fin de Siècle* (1991; repr., London: Virago, 1995), 40.
[13] Mona Caird, introduction to *The Morality of Marriage, and other Essays on the Status and Destiny of Woman*, by Mona Caird (London: George Redway, 1897), 13.

the modern woman. Valeria sees the hope of the next generation in her. She even writes a novel with a thinly veiled version of Hadria as the main character, and when Hadria does something unexpected, Valeria tells her that '[m]y *Caterina* would never have done it' (190). Hadria in this way becomes responsible not only for living out her own dreams, but Valeria's as well. As so much of the novel consists of characters arguing out their different points in the debate on women's role, it would perhaps be easy to see Hadria as just the mouthpiece of the author, coughing up the right sentiments every now and then, but as Margaret Morganroth Gullette points out, Hadria is far more than that; she feels *real*.[14] She does not always know the right thing to do, and sometimes she acts in direct opposition to what her friends and family expect. Valeria, on her part, accustomed to thinking in black and white, does not always take this reality into account: to her it sometimes seems Hadria is as much of a stereotype of the New Woman as the caricatures in the newspaper.

One dilemma for the New Women writers was whether to seek modifications of existing conventions or to work towards changing the rules altogether. Embedded in this were questions of whom it was wise to choose as allies, and how to convince these to support the cause. As Ann Heilmann points out, writers such as Sarah Grand and Mona Caird demonstrate the diversity of strategies that were applied: 'Both sought to further the public acceptance of feminism through socialising their readership(s) into New Woman thought, yet one operated on the principle of feminine subterfuge and seduction, while the other flaunted political shock tactics.'[15] *The Daughters of Danaus*'s Hadria is in a sense trying to do both. While always speaking her mind plainly (and shockingly), she at the same time tries to placate her family by not doing anything *too* drastic. Her one attempt at freedom is thwarted by her mother's failing health, and after this, she loses her faith in the battle somewhat. 'It is useless for women to try to fight against men; they can only *hate* them!' (433), she resigns.

Caird's 'shock tactics' are apparent throughout *The Daughters of Danaus*. Motherhood is compared to prostitution (343), weddings to ritual sacrifices (249). Algitha opposes her parents to start a nursing career, and Hadria leaves her family for her music; both choices are seen as right. Appeals to the inherent nature of men or women are brushed away with contempt, and in one extremely disturbing image, Caird highlights the extent to which men are in control of nature, anyway:

> It was the estimable and domestic qualities of Nature that presented themselves. Nature in her most maternal and uninspired mood – Mother earth submissive to the

[14] Margaret Morganroth Gullette, afterword to *The Daughters of Danaus*, 505–6.
[15] Ann Heilmann, *New Woman Strategies: Sarah Grand, Olive Schreiner, Mona Caird* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), 162.

> dictatorship of man, permitting herself to be torn, and wounded, and furrowed, and harrowed at his pleasure, yielding her substance and her life to sustain the produce of his choosing, her body and her soul abandoned supine to his caprice. (172–73)

While shocking the readers into pursuing new and revolutionary lines of thought, Caird does not let change happen immediately in *The Daughters of Danaus* – and this to the frustration of Hadria especially. She is no activist; she does no political work other than clearly to state her opinions even in the face of opposition, but she does initially hope for the world to change at least enough for her to follow her dreams. Impatiently, she expresses her annoyance with the fact that 'women are so ready to oppress each other!,' while Professor Fortescue gently reminds her that it is '[b]ecause they have themselves suffered oppression' (450). Bludgeoning people like Lady Engleton over the head with new ideas might cause them to retreat into safety instead of luring them out. Hadria must accept that change often happens slowly, just as the landscape surrounding her childhood home is moulded over centuries but remains unaffected by just one bout of stormy weather:

> [T]he wind kept up its cannonade against the walls, hooting in the chimneys with derisive voices, and flinging itself, in mad revolt, against the old-established hills and the stable earth, which changed its forms only in slow obedience to the persuadings of the elements, in the passing of centuries. It cared nothing for the passion of a single storm. (116)

Instead of being the unofficial representative of New Womanhood who has to do everything right, Hadria's contribution to change turns out to be her taking just a small step in the right direction. Just as evolutionary changes happen slowly and gradually, social change takes time, according to Caird. Not being able to see the final reaches of one's influence should not be a reason for losing faith, Hadria realises, but for keeping it. Tiny acts done by enough people might in combination be what it takes to change society.

4.2 The Morality of Marriage

According to Sally Ledger, 'one of the defining features of the dominant discourse on the New Woman at the *fin de siècle* was the supposition that the New Woman posed a threat to the institution of marriage.'[16] The threat appeared in different guises. One was the image of the hyper-sexualised New Woman such as the female vampires or Lucy Westenra in *Dracula*, who appeared as disturbing in their obvious and aggressive sexuality. In the words of the contemporary critic Hugh Stutfield, '[e]mancipated woman in particular loves to show her independence by dealing freely with the relations of the sexes,' and to him 'most of the

[16] Ledger, *The New Woman*, 11.

characters in [New Woman fiction] seem to be erotomaniacs.' [17] That the New Woman could not immediately be 'dismissed as a prostitute or a fallen woman,' even if she did speak and write frankly about sexuality, made her presence only more disquieting.[18] The nervous, intellectual, and asexual version of the New Woman, exemplified by Sue Bridehead in *Jude the Obscure*, was a threat of a different kind. If women used up all their energy on learning, how could they function in their roles as wives and mothers? And if they started to prefer platonic relationships, how could the 'race' (and the British Empire) go on? Marriage and the nuclear family were seen as two of the main building blocks of the Empire, and if these were in danger, so was the whole of society.[19]

Mona Caird emphatically made her mark on this discussion when she published her essay 'Marriage' in the *Westminster Review* in 1888. The original did not really receive widespread attention, but after the *Daily Telegraph*, the biggest newspaper at the time, responded to it by opening a letters column called 'Is Marriage a Failure?,' encouraging readers to share their opinions and experiences, public interest exploded. The column continued until it had received more than 27 000 replies. While the *Westminster Review* had a somewhat select readership, the *Daily Telegraph* made the discussion available to the general public.[20] Outlining the history of marriage, Caird argued that marriage customs were culturally determined, and that it was imperative that a change in the current system should occur – both because it was right and just, *and* because it would be in the race's best interests. In *The Daughters of Danaus*, she continues this argument and examines marriage and motherhood from the point of view of a woman who desires neither, but is more or less tricked into them by the conventions of society.

Running through *The Daughters of Danaus* is a discussion of the role of mothers and of women in general. Hadria's main quarrel with society is that it insists upon seeing the two as interchangeable, something that is, in her view, plainly unreasonable. There is no real place for a woman who is not a mother, or at least a wife, in her world, and if you are a mother, that is all you should be. Instead of women being able to develop their talents and pursue their own interests, they should, according to the dominant contemporary norms, become so wrapped up in their children that they practically ceased to exist in their own right. The having and rearing of children was, from this vantage point, thought to be the primary purpose

[17] Hugh E. M. Stutfield, 'Tommyrotics,' in *Fin de Siècle: A Reader in Cultural History, c. 1880–1900*, ed. Sally Ledger and Roger Luckhurst (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 123.
[18] Cunningham, *The New Woman and the Victorian Novel*, 14.
[19] Ledger, *The New Woman*, 12.
[20] Morganroth Gullette, afterword to *The Daughters of Danaus*, 495.

of women's lives. 'It is as an *animal* that one has to play the really important part in life,' as Hadria says (69). The injustice of women having to be at the mercy of their bodies – and subjected to men's appropriation of their bodies – in this way, while the men can do more or less as they please, is central to the novel. Even where the female characters are allowed some measure of freedom, they simply do not have the time to take advantage of it. The constant demands made on women's everyday time from parents, husbands, or children are compared to the relentless movement of 'Old Time [who] makes no comment, but moves quietly on' (480). In the words of Patricia Murphy, '[t]emporality is thus accorded a double focus in this text through which daily disciplinary constraints on the exercise of time are contextualized within the oppressive burden of history.'[21] The women do not have any time to call their own, and when they try to protest, they are told that this is the way it has always been. Always at the back of their minds, 'the beat of [Time's] footstep sounds in [their] ears' (480). Women are in a sense kept out of time or out of history in that their time does not count in the world around them – they can always be interrupted or asked to take care of this or that before they continue their work. Murphy notes that in Victorian society, 'temporal control became a vehicle for social control in reinforcing the separate spheres.'[22] If women were always kept busy, they could not be contemplating societal change. The main task women could perform that was truly *in* time was to give birth, and even then they were only present in history as conduits for the next generation.

The sacredness of motherhood was one of the main arguments for keeping Victorian women in the home. Caird counters this by letting Hadria deconstruct the image of the sacred mother. As Hadria very reasonably points out to Lady Engleton, if motherhood were holy in itself, society would encourage young girls to become mothers as soon as they were able, no matter whether they were married or not (254). Society, however, expects young girls never even to think about having children until they are married, and when that day finally arrives, their minds ought suddenly to be occupied with nothing else. In Hadria's eyes, the inconsistency is glaring. It also highlights how thin the line between being a 'good' or a 'bad' woman could be in Victorian society. Doing perfectly normal things like marrying and having a baby, only in the wrong order, could be enough to shut you out of decent society forever. Hadria not only stresses the lack of difference between 'good' women and women like the village schoolteacher, who makes one mistake and is made to regret it, but also the parallel

[21] Patricia Murphy, *Time Is of the Essence: Temporality, Gender, and the New Woman* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001), 151.
[22] Murphy, *Time Is of the Essence*, 156.

between women who exchange sex for respectability and women who exchange sex for money: 'Motherhood, as our wisdom has appointed it, among civilized people, represents a prostitution of the reproductive powers, which precisely corresponds to that other abuse, which seems to most of us so infinitely more shocking' (343). The comparison is outrageous to Henriette, who is always on the side of what is deemed right and proper. In Hadria's view, men have no right to hold women to an ideal of holiness and virtue when their own behaviour is wanting. If it were not for men, there would not be two 'classes' of women in the first place:

> It is such insolence to talk to us – good heavens, to us! – about holiness and sacredness, when men (to whom surely a sense of humour has been denied) divide their women into two great classes, both of whom they insult and enslave, insisting peremptorily on the existence of each division, but treating one class as private and the other as public property. (306)

Caird's 'attack' on motherhood is quite unique in New Woman fiction.[23] Other New Woman writers, such as Sarah Grand, chose to view motherhood as the place where women had the most influence – and to use that for what it was worth. They retained the general narrative about the sacredness of motherhood and even extrapolated from it that women were somehow *better* than men when it came to moral or spiritual matters. Society had demanded higher standards from women for a long time, and social purity feminists claimed that these standards had become natural for women, just as promiscuity had become accepted, and eventually natural (as they thought), for men.[24] The alarming spread of venereal disease, linked as it was in people's minds with prostitution and degradation, led these feminists to the conclusion that men's urges and men's behaviour were endangering the health of future generations: 'Men were potential agents of degeneration, biologically designed for *immorality*; if the future were left to them, the inevitable result would be racial degeneration. Thus, degeneration was a masculine narrative, while regeneration, which reversed its plot, was feminine.'[25] This view of the current situation afforded women an important part – or even the most important part – in determining the future of the race. Social purists demanded that men should be held to the same standards as women and that chastity outside of marriage should be the norm for everyone, but since they thought immorality had become an innate part of the character of many men, they did not think that the men around them would change. The way to reform would have to go through the next generations. Women had to choose

[23] See, e.g., Cunningham, *The New Woman and the Victorian Novel*, 72.
[24] Angelique Richardson, *Love and Eugenics in the Late Nineteenth Century: Rational Reproduction and the New Woman* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 48–49.
[25] Richardson, *Love and Eugenics*, 52.

carefully whom they married, and by selecting fathers for their children on what they thought of as rational grounds, they hoped to breed men's alleged taste for vice out of the human race.[26] Instead of seeing mothers as 'just' delegated to their sphere, these New Women emphasised the importance of the work that went on in that sphere. Such an approach is radically different from Caird's Hadria, who feels her sphere as a prison and her children as the jailers: 'Throughout history, she reflected, children had been the unfailing means of bringing women into line with tradition. Who could stand against them?' (187). With an outspokenness rare at the time, Caird showed her readers how having children tied women down in a way that nothing else could, both because of the natural desire to protect them and because the repercussions of neglecting them would be so much worse for women than for men.

While the reasoning behind the idea of separate spheres or callings for men and women had, for many, ceased to be grounded in the will of God or Providence by the *fin de siècle*, the argument was often refashioned, but with Nature in God's place.[27] Medical doctors such as Henry Maudsley advocated the idea of women as something reminiscent of walking wombs, and claimed that any sort of exertion apart from that connected with motherhood would put women's chances of becoming mothers at risk.[28] Seeing through 'men of science' and their arguments, Hadria's response to an appeal to scientific authority is scathing: 'They rush to the rescue when they see the sentimental defences giving way.… If the "sacred privilege" and "noblest vocation" safeguards won't hold, science must throw up entrenchments' (256). Clearly noticing that both science and religion can be used to oppress people as well as giving them answers, Hadria refuses to believe in anything blindly. After all, as Caird argues in her essay 'A Defence of the Wild Women': 'Nature, besides designing women to be mothers, designed men to be fathers: why, then, should not the man give up his life to his family in the same wholesome way?'[29] Other related arguments are also activated in *The Daughters of Danaus*, such as the question of why, if women are little more than children at best, or animals at worst, they are to be trusted with any sort of responsibility over other human beings, and why, if the care and education of small children is so important and sacred, men do not *want* to involve themselves in it on a larger scale. The truth was that for many 'men of science' in late-Victorian society, changing the situation for women was not a high

[26] Richardson, *Love and Eugenics*, 57.
[27] Lucy Bland, *Banishing the Beast: Feminism, Sex and Morality* (1995; repr., London: Tauris Parke Paperbacks, 2001), 48.
[28] Henry Maudsley, *Sex in Mind and in Education* (Syracuse: C. W. Bardeen, 1884), accessed January 26, 2012, http://www.archive.org/stream/sexinmindandine00maudgoog#page/n6/mode/2up, 5.
[29] Mona Caird, 'A Defence of the "Wild Women," in *The Morality of Marriage*, 171.

priority, and some, like Maudsley, were even directly opposed to such changes, as they deemed them harmful. Others, like the mathematician and eugenicist Karl Pearson, went along with feminist notions as long as they themselves seemed to gain from them, but did not actually support women in their own right.[30]

Pearson was one of the initiators of The Men and Women's Club, which was founded in 1885 as a forum where a small, carefully chosen group of scientifically inclined men and women could openly discuss issues related to gender and the relationship between the sexes. Mona Caird was suggested as a possible member, but was eventually rejected partly because she was thought to be too partisan for the objective kinds of discussions the Club wanted to have.[31] She did attend at least one of the meetings as a guest, however, to discuss contraception and family planning, and she also corresponded with Olive Schreiner, who was one of the original members. To several members, Caird's 'Marriage' essay, the following spectacle, and the Club felt connected, because of the relation between the topic of the article and the debates usually undertaken in the Club. Earlier articles by Pearson had also touched upon some of the same issues. According to Lucy Bland, Caird 'drew heavily on the anthropological and historical arguments used by Pearson.'[32] The historical and anthropological evidence supported Caird's claim that attitudes towards marriage were dependent upon time and place.

The identification of different historical customs surrounding marriage is a large part of Caird's essay, and the characters of *The Daughters of Danaus* continue the discussion about whether practices and attitudes are determined by instinct or by culture. Early on in the novel, Hadria's brother tries to defend the differences in the education of girls and boys with the fact that girls are not supposed to do anything other than getting married and have children, anyway, so they might as well be spared certain things. According to him, there really are inherent differences between girls and boys, and girls should be content with what is dictated to them by nature dictates. '[T]here *are* such things as natural instincts,' he says, expecting this to settle the discussion. 'There *are* such things as acquired tricks,' counters Hadria, having made her point crystal clear by likening women to trained poodles, a comparison that probably did not go down too well with proponents of the sanctity of motherhood (23). The appeal to nature is dishonest, in Caird's view, because it tries to deflect responsibility away from the people in charge – men. '[H]ow false are all the inferences of

[30] See for example Bland, *Banishing the Beast*, 11.
[31] Bland, *Banishing the Beast*, 126.
[32] Bland, *Banishing the Beast*, 127.

phrases such as "Nature intends," "Nature desires,"' she writes. '[Nature] intends and desires nothing – she is an abject slave. *Man* intends, *Man* desires, and "Nature," in the course of centuries, learns to obey. This worship of "Nature" is a strange survival in a scientific age of the old image – worship of our ancestors.'[33] This ancestor worship that Caird recognises becomes, perhaps, even stranger in light of how determined contemporary human beings were to separate themselves from nature. Technology pushed the physical limits of human life; medicine extended life itself. Philosophy and religion separated humans from animals, while mortar and brick kept the outdoors from intruding upon modern family life. For someone to use 'Nature intends' as an argument, makes as much sense as saying everyone should all live in caves, according to Caird: 'It seems to be forgotten that "nature" indicates all sorts of things which civilised beings presume to ignore.'[34]

Even if nature did not 'intend' anything specific, it might nevertheless be thought to be working in a certain direction. One argument was that women had evolved into the role they now occupied, and that they therefore should and must stay that way. This does not ring true for Caird, who argues that one central part of evolution is precisely the notion of change as *beneficial*, as well as inevitable. Nature changes, society changes, and humans have to change accordingly, or they will regress. When stasis became the ideal for women, women were, in Caird's words, 'treated as if they alone were exempt from the influences of natural selection.'[35] The people who claimed to be on the side of nature could, in fact, be seen as working against it. Karl Pearson, for one, stated quite clearly in The Men and Women's Club that it was in the race's best interest that women should have many healthy children, and if the price for that was oppression, then women would just have to accept it and sacrifice themselves.[36] As the social purists' concern for the future of the race became linked to unease about the possible future of the Empire, women's place in the sphere became a duty as well as a calling: 'Reproduction was no longer a sacred, private act, but one of public service, into which one entered from rational choice and a sense of duty.'[37] That the right kind of women should marry the right kind of men and have the right kind of children became of vital importance, and women's 'natural' role in the process was framed as their service to their country:

> Responsible motherhood was a moral obligation and a woman's first act of citizenship in late Victorian Britain. It conferred nobility, prestige, and power. At a time when

[33] Caird, 'A Defence of the "Wild Women,"' 173.
[34] Caird, introduction to *The Morality of Marriage*, 6.
[35] Mona Caird, 'Marriage,' in *The Morality of Marriage*, 63.
[36] Bland, *Banishing the Beast*, 28.
[37] Richardson, *Love and Eugenics*, 72.

> concern over national efficiency and empire, motherhood and imperialism were drawn into an alliance in which the function of reproduction was crucial.[38]

This is a notion with which Caird strongly disagrees. Women's sacrifices are referred to again and again in *The Daughters of Danaus*; the theme is elaborated upon in her articles, and she also published the novel *The Stones of Sacrifice* in 1915, dealing with eugenic marriage and female self-sacrifice. The idea that it could be in the race's best interest to stunt the development of one half of it is nonsensical to her: 'One-half of the race, in short, is to be rescued at the expense of the other. Strange as it may appear, men of science have advocated this singular method of averting the danger of race degeneration.'[39] She sees change and variety as necessary in order to prevent degeneration, and she counters fears over the possible ill effects of women's emancipation with appeals to the very faith in nature that her opponents liked to claim:

> [I]f modern women are lapsing from the true faith, if they are really insurgents against evolutionary human nature, instead of being the indications of a new social development, then their fatal error will assuredly prove itself in a very short time. Should some harm be suffered in the proving, that is merely the risk that has to be taken, in all free states, to secure the possibility of progress.[40]

Something must in any case be done, because the situation for women in Victorian society is not doing the race any favours, as Caird presents it. When women's talents are all steered in the same direction, society loses all the valuable input these women could have given if they had had the opportunity to educate themselves according to their strengths. When women are encouraged never to speak up for themselves, and always listen to the men in their lives, it also enables a culture of deceit, where women have to lie, sweet-talk, and go behind their husbands' backs to get what they want. Hadria, who usually is honest to a fault, claims that Victorian middle-class society is an environment that is actually more suited to what the popular opinion would think the entirely wrong sort of woman: 'It is cunning, shallow, heartless women, who really fare best in our society; its conditions suit them. … *That* is the sort of "woman's nature" that our conditions are busy selecting. Let us cultivate it. We live in a scientific age; the fittest survive. Let us be "fit"' (347). As seen in *Dracula*, what is 'fit' to live in a certain environment does not necessarily equal 'good' or 'moral.' Caird's plea is for men and women to work together towards changing the conditions of society; maybe that means humans will change too.

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[38] Richardson, *Love and Eugenics*, 75.
[39] Mona Caird, 'The Morality of Marriage,' in *The Morality of Marriage*, 136.
[40] Caird, 'A Defence of the "Wild Women,"' 169.

4.3 The Human Element in Man – and in Animals

While the necessity of societal change when it comes to women is the main theme of *The Daughters of Danaus*, it is not the only cause about which the characters are passionate. The characters also engage in an exploration of the way their society chooses to treat non-humans. In a novel so emphatically about the condition of women, it might seem odd that Professor Fortescue, who functions as the moral compass of the book, devotes large parts of his professional career to the betterment of *animal* life. This is not just a little quirk in his character, however, put there to flesh out his backstory or to give the characters something else to talk about for a change. On the contrary, his attitude to animals is an absolutely vital part of the novel's outlining of a viable ethics for a progressive society. Women and animals are compared over and over in the novel, and for many late Victorians, Caird included, the question of how to treat non-human animals went straight to the heart of what it meant to be human. This question, along with others pertaining to the relationship between humans and animals, the cost of (racial) progress, and the position of science in society (and of ethics in science), culminated in the late-Victorian vivisection debate.

The increasing number of experiments on live animals in the late nineteenth century led to a cry for regulation, or even abolition, of this practice. Scientists claimed that it was necessary for them to be able to work unhindered, while their opponents thought it a scandal that they were allowed to experiment on animals at all. Antivivisection activists organised several campaigns to make the general public aware of the gruesome details of vivisectionist practice, and in 1876 the Cruelty to Animals Act was passed in order to regulate vivisection.[41] The debate continued, however, between those who wanted to outlaw the practice and those who demanded academic and scientific freedom.

In much the same manner as the notion of degeneration served to dampen late-Victorian optimism regarding the future of the human race, the vivisection debate changed the public's perspective on scientists:

> As a result of campaigns against vivisection, the 1876 Royal Commissioners had noted, 'A feeling of suspicion and even of abhorrence (had) been permitted to grow up among a large and very estimable portion of the public against those who are devoted to the improvement of medicine and the advancement of science.'[42]

The question now became how far these scientists were willing to go to obtain knowledge, and whether the price was worth paying. Fictional representatives of the medical profession

[41] Hilda Kean, 'The "Smooth Cool Men of Science": The Feminist and Socialist Response to Vivisection,' *History Workshop Journal* 40 (1995): 19.
[42] Kean, 'Smooth Cool Men of Science,' 21.

such as Wells's Dr Moreau (*The Island of Dr Moreau*, 1896) and Wilkie Collins's Dr Benjulia (*Heart and Science*, 1883) kept the topic alive in the readers' minds. Replacing the image of the benevolent doctor working tirelessly for the good of mankind was the new image of a cool and detached experimenter who regarded the whole of the physical world as his potential guinea pig. Dr Benjulia vividly expresses some of the sentiments of which people were afraid:

> Am I working myself into my grave, in the medical interests of humanity? *That* for humanity! I am working for my own satisfaction – for my own pride – for my own unutterable pleasure in beating other men – for the fame that will keep my name living hundreds of years hence. Humanity! I say with my foreign brethren – Knowledge for its own sake, is the one god I worship. Knowledge is its own justification and its own reward. The roaring mob follows us with its cry of Cruelty. We pity their ignorance. Knowledge sanctifies cruelty. The old anatomist stole dead bodies for Knowledge. In that sacred cause, if I could steal a living man without being found out, I would tie him on my table, and grasp my grand discovery in days, instead of months.[43]

The antivivisectionists argued that if the vivisectionists were happy to perform horrible experiments on animals, who was to say they would not turn to humans next? Because the antivivisectionist campaigns often relied on an appeal to people's emotions, discussions could become quite heated, and the images given of the vivisectionists sometimes approached caricature.

One task of the antivivisectionists was to make the public aware that, when taking the practices of known laboratories into account, Dr Benjulia was not so much of an exaggeration as one might initially assume. Supporting the antivivisectionist cause, Mona Caird wrote several essays and pamphlets building the case against vivisection. By extensively quoting medical journals, she gives her readers the opportunity to judge the scientists' own descriptions of their work for themselves. She quotes detailed accounts of horrifying experiments to show the readers the reality of vivisection, but is at the same time careful *not* to demonise the persons who were practicing it. On the contrary, her project is to make the public understand that scientists are people just like them, and that as long as vivisection is accepted in general society, the practice will continue. As with people's concepts of gender norms, attitudes to animals are conditioned by society, and the yardstick for most people is not what is *good*, but what is *normal*, according to Caird. Vivisection was undoubtedly cruel, and yet many vivisectionists were eminent members of society and generally regarded as good men. These conflicting facts were confusing to parts of the public. Since the

[43] Wilkie Collins, *Heart and Science: A Story of the Present Time*, 1883; repr., Project Gutenberg, accessed February 9, 2012, http://www.gutenberg.org/catalog/world/readfile?fk_files=1468674&pageno=146, 146.

vivisectionists were good men, and good men did not behave cruelly, vivisection could not be as terrible as the antivivisectionists claimed, the argument went. Caird seeks to open people's eyes to the fact that good men will do whatever their society deems right to do, even to the point of having boiled infants for dinner:

> The average man will accept with a light heart all that he has been trained to regard as justifiable and as a matter of course, no matter how cruel or atrocious. … We may rest assured that in a society where it was regarded as a matter of course, for instance, that every respectable family should partake of boiled infant for its regular Christmas dinner, not merely the heartless and cruel, but the kind and good members of the community would sit round and enjoy the dish with perfect cheerfulness, and march off to church with the same sense of virtue and the same irreproachable demeanour that distinguishes our pillars of society, at the present unimpeachable moment. It is not the great gulf which they assume between infant and turkey, so much as the vast chasm between what *everybody* does and what *nobody* does, that is really at the bottom of their conduct, and of their ardent convictions on this and all other matters, religious or secular.[44]

The horror experienced by Jonathan Harker (and the reader) when the vampire women in *Dracula* feast on human blood is magnified because the blood in question belongs to a child. Turning the sacred image of the nurturing mother upside down, the vampires eat the very person nature intended them to feed.[45] Bram Stoker uses this to illustrate exactly how frightening and abnormal these vampires are. Caird reaches for the image for much the same reason, namely that the thought of eating human flesh – and that of a *child* – would strike her readers as the most revolting and unnatural act imaginable. But instead of monsters, her cannibals are pillars of society. This is not, however, the place for terror; she has already shown where that belongs – in the torture chamber of the vivisectionist. With the image of cannibalism, she coolly makes it clear to the reader how conditional even the most deep-seated norms of society really are. In this conditionality is also where hope lies. The only possibility for change, in Caird's view, is for society to decide that the practice of vivisection is no longer acceptable. That necessarily means that the responsibility lies with the general public, and with the people who make laws, not with the medical profession. It is highly unrealistic to hope that the vivisectionists on their own initiative should come to the conclusion that vivisection is unethical. It is, in fact, not only unrealistic; it is unreasonable: 'Surely this ought to show us the utter folly of supposing that a good man – as the standard of his time goes – can do no wrong. … In fact it takes nothing short of a special "revelation"

[44] Mona Caird, 'Beyond the Pale: An Appeal on the Behalf of the Victims of Vivisection' (London: William Reeves, 1897), repr., The Victorian Women Writer's Project, accessed February 4, 2012, http://purl.dlib.indiana.edu/iudl/vwwp/VAB7025, 16–17.
[45] Christopher Craft, '"Kiss Me with those Red Lips": Gender and Inversion in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*,' *Representations* 8 (1984): 120.

(however the word may be interpreted) to create a new standard.'[46] To demand a special, higher, ethical standard of scientists, especially when they have invested so much in the continuance of their work, would not lead to anything, but if each individual were to take responsibility for their own attitudes, and work to influence the attitudes of the people around them, change might be possible.

Antivivisectionists used different arguments against vivisection, one of them being the close relationship between humans and animals. People had become more and more aware of this relationship as different theories of evolution and descent were published. Pet owners and observers of nature had long been aware of the wide emotional register of animals, and Charles Darwin described the common reaction patterns of humans and animals in *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* (1872). According to Jed Mayer, the acceptance of there being emotional links between humans and animals was already so strong, and the relationship was so cemented in Victorian culture that Darwin was able to use this to make his theory of common descent more palatable.[47] When people could see their own emotions mirrored in the pets they loved the most, the notion of a common ancestry became a little more believable and acceptable.

The similarities between humans and animals also, of course, laid the foundation for vivisection in the first place. Vivisectionists first and foremost experimented in order to gain knowledge, but their main argument was that this knowledge would be beneficial to the human race, because the results from experimenting upon animals would be applicable to humans.[48] Through vivisection, science would be able to gain new insight into for example the nervous system, and this insight could serve as the basis for better medical treatment in the future. The same similarities put the vivisectionists in a difficult position, however, because if humans and animals were so physically similar that an experiment on one would be valid for the other, then there was a good possibility that the emotional and perhaps even spiritual resemblances would be just as great.[49] Antivivisectionists maintained that if animals could feel emotions – and especially pain – in the same ways that humans did, then it was brutally cruel to torture them for the edification of the human race.

In *The Daughters of Danaus*, attitudes towards animals serve as a measure of character. Professor Fortescue, who is practically Christ-like, is the novel's shining beacon of

[46] Caird, 'Beyond the Pale,' 14.
[47] Jed Mayer, 'The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Laboratory Animals,' *Victorian Studies* 50, no. 3 (2008): 402.
[48] Mayer, 'Expression of Emotions,' 400.
[49] Mayer, 'Expression of Emotions,' 401.

hope and inspiration: ‘If such natures were in existence, there must be a great source of goodness and tenderness somewhere in heaven and earth, and the battle of life must be worth fighting’ (85). While empathising deeply with the plight of women in Victorian society, Fortescue’s heart is with those who cannot speak up for themselves. His later work, for which other scientists ridicule him, is the development of a cheap and practical way of killing animals without their feeling any pain, so that humans can go on eating meat with a (somewhat) better conscience. On his deathbed, this is the professor’s most proud achievement and the one he asks his friends to remember (484–85). While some of the characters see Fortescue’s goodness and empathy as his weak points, making him unable to function effectively in a harsh world, others see him as the embodiment of an ideal which they can only try to emulate. His care for animals becomes one of the main characteristics that signal his status as more evolved than the people around him; he is one of the few who has experienced the ‘special revelation’ that Caird sees as a requisite for change: ‘[Hadria] believed that he was inordinately, tenderly, superlatively human, and that he had gone many steps further in that direction than the rest of his generation. He was dowered with instincts and perceptions belonging to some kinder, nobler race than ours’ (100).

Among Fortescue’s fellow scientists, however, his work on behalf of animals is met with bafflement or outright derision. Professor Theobald claims it a pity that ‘a man so able should waste his time over these fads. It would never bring him fame or profit, only ridicule’ (180). Even Miss Du Prel, who has been in love with Fortescue for years, ‘would rather see him working in the cause of humanity,’ to which Hadria’s brother responds that humanity might be ‘well served, in the long run, by reminding it of the responsibility that goes with power, and by giving it an object lesson in the decent treatment of those who can’t defend themselves’ (181).

As already noted, the possible advantages of such scientific experiments to humanity formed the cornerstone of the pro-vivisectionist argument. Having already used evolutionary theory to explain why experiments upon animals could benefit humans, physiologists turned to another interpretation of evolution to justify their taking such liberties with their distant relatives. They now focussed on the *differences* between humans and animals and claimed that because humans were much further evolved, they had the right to treat other species as they pleased:

> For many, Darwinian ideas of evolution demonstrated the superiority of humans as creatures far more ‘evolved’ than other creatures and entitled to far more consideration. Hence it was our separation from, not our similarity to, other creatures

> that became the relevant factor, even if such a 'ladder' conception of the theory of evolution is quite misleading.[50]

Darwin himself was in favour of vivisection if the cause was noble, even though he loved animals and found the practice barbaric.[51] Some argued that not only did humans have the right to use animals to gain knowledge; they had a duty to do whatever they could to increase humanity's chances in the struggle for existence.[52] In this narrative, humans and animals were not companions; they were competitors. Caird, on her part, is doubtful that vivisection really will bring humanity knowledge that it could not have gained in other ways, but even if it will, the practice is still not justified. No matter how advanced humanity can become, if it is based on the suffering of animals, the price is too dear to pay:

> But granted that there *were* such apparent profit from this crime; I should still deny that anything was gained, in the long run, even physically, to set against the awful moral degradation involved; for pain and pleasure are not mere abstract signs of quantity or number, of which one can be taken from the other, leaving a simple and indifferent plus or minus behind them. … We may do our little subtraction sums to all eternity, and *we do not alter the fact of the extremity of any individual suffering*, and surely it is clear that there *is* no suffering except individual suffering.[53]

It is exactly this calculating approach to suffering that puts Hadria off Professor Theobald in *The Daughters of Danaus*. In contrast to Fortescue, Theobald would not have any scruples in pursuing a course which he perceived would benefit him in some way:

> She felt that, in order to investigate the workings of her mind and her heart, the Professor would have coolly pursued the most ruthless psychical experiments, no matter at what cost of anguish to herself. In the interests of science and humanity, the learned Professor would certainly not hesitate to make one wretched individual agonize. (217)

It does not come as a surprise when the reader learns (or rather has it confirmed) that it is Theobald who is responsible for the ruin of the village's respectable schoolteacher. With his cavalier attitude to animals, such behaviour towards women, the text leads us to understand, is only to be expected.

'It is in regard to women and animals that we see the clearest and grossest survivals from pure savagery,' Caird writes in 'Beyond the Pale.'[54] According to Kean, '[w]omen in particular empathised with animals as an object of the male gaze and physical violation and

[50] Rod Preece, 'Darwinism, Christianity, and the Great Vivisection Debate,' *Journal of the History of Ideas* 64, no. 3 (2003): 403.
[51] Preece, 'The Great Vivisection Debate,' 412.
[52] Mayer, 'Expression of Emotion,' 410.
[53] Caird, 'Beyond the Pale,' 31–32.
[54] Caird, 'Beyond the Pale,' 68.

saw an identification with them.'[55] Bland notes the eerie parallel between vivisection and the medical profession's increasing eagerness to perform surgery on the female body.[56] In *The Daughters of Danaus,* this bond between women and animals has several implications. The female characters are treated *as* animals by the society in which they live. The reduction of women's lives to the demands of their bodies makes this an apt, if polemical, description. But the fact that there *is* a difference between women and animals is precisely the point that (especially) Hadria wishes to make: Women should be allowed to be *humans* instead of, or in addition to, being animals. The analogy between women and animals thus only goes so far, because the goals presented for each are essentially different. Whereas women ought to be able to decide for themselves how to live their lives because they are human and this is a right every human should have, animals should be well taken care of because this is humanity's responsibility. The evolutionary consequences of the mistreatment of women *and* animals are only applied to the human race.

Professor Fortescue sees his quest to end animal suffering as his small part in the greater process of humanity's evolution. Towards the end of his life, he speaks of a 'spiritual evolutionary process' (487). The goal is for humans to develop morally and ethically to the point where they no longer will want to exploit other living beings: '[Fortescue] insisted that the supreme business of man, was to evolve a scheme of life on a higher plane, wherein the weak shall not be forced to agonize for the strong, so far as mankind can intervene to prevent it' (102). As Angelique Richardson notes, in order to envision such a future, Caird draws on the same ideas as T. H. Huxley regarding the relationship between nature and morality.[57] In *Evolution and Ethics*, Huxley describes a direct opposition between what is generally thought of as ethical behaviour and the behaviour deemed necessary for survival. To be ethical, then, is to go against or above nature, to decide what rules you want in a society and live by them: '[T]he ethical progress of society depends, not on imitating the cosmic process, still less in running away from it, but in combating it,' and influence must be directed 'not so much to the survival of the fittest, as to the fitting of as many as possible to survive.'[58] This also ties in with Jean-Baptiste Lamarck's theory of the inheritance of acquired characteristics, which infers that humans can progress in evolutionary terms through education and better social conditions.[59] This is how Professor Fortescue puts the point: 'Let people talk as they please

[55] Kean, 'Smooth Cool Men of Science,' 27.
[56] Bland, *Banishing the Beast*, 69.
[57] Richardson, *Love and Eugenics*, 194.
[58] T. H. Huxley, 'From *Evolution and Ethics* (1893),' in *The Fin de Siècle*, 239.
[59] Richardson, *Love and Eugenics*, 11.

about the struggle for existence, it is through the development of the human mind and the widening of human mercy that better things will come' (272). For the human race to reach its potential, men and women must be at liberty to exercise all their powers, and they must acknowledge their responsibility towards 'less developed' beings.

4.4 Directions of Change

To have progress, one must have change, but Victorian society was resistant to proposed changes in regard to the family. Mona Caird, however, saw changes in the home as a way of furthering progress: 'To bring the institution of the family up to date is among the next great tasks of progressive civilisation.'[60] Agreeing with Huxley that humanity must in a sense turn away from nature to be able to create a just society, Caird also sees this as a way for humans to take evolution in their own hands and steer it in the direction they want: 'The changes suggested here, involve an immense increase of complexity, a widening of the human horizon. We are, in fact, contemplating a stupendous step of racial progress.'[61] Richardson suggests that when Caird uses evolutionary terms such as progress or degeneration, she is in reality talking about social or cultural characteristics, not biological ones.[62] She certainly focusses on the conditional parts of human society – possibly because that is where she sees the greatest possibility for intervention. Rejecting the ideas that biology is everything and that life necessitates competition, she demands that everyone take responsibility and own up to their part in shaping the society in which they live: '*Belief in the power of man to choose his direction of change*: – this is the creed of the future, and it will soon come to be the distinctive mark of the essentially modern thinker,' she notes in the essay 'The Future of the Home.'[63] Even if Hadria's personal struggle for release from her bonds eventually fails, and the forces of convention are so strong that resisting seems almost impossible, the reader is still left with a sense of hope.

After having explained how the oppression of women is harmful to the human race in evolutionary terms, Caird entices the reader with a vision of a future where humans have gone beyond the need for struggle and have decided to live in harmony with each other and with other living beings. Borrowing terminology and logic from different theories of evolution and heredity, she picks and mixes, choosing the parts that best fit her purpose. The result is a

[60] Mona Caird, 'The Emancipation of the Family,' in *The Morality of Marriage*, 58.
[61] Caird, 'Marriage,' 111.
[62] Angelique Richardson, '"People Talk a Lot of Nonsense about Heredity": Mona Caird and Anti-Eugenic Feminism,' in *Fin-de-Siècle Feminisms*, 200.
[63] Mona Caird, 'The Future of the Home,' in *The Morality of Marriage*, 116.

novel that could have felt crushingly deterministic and also partly does, as Ledger notes.[64] At the time of Hubert's second proposal, the proposal which Hadria finds herself unable to reject, all she can think is 'All had been pre-arranged. Nothing could avert it. She seemed to be waiting rather than acting' (139). Even Hadria's prophetic vision of a better future is laced with despair:

> She recalled a strange and grotesque vision, or waking-dream, that she had dreamt a few nights before: of a vast abyss, black and silent, which had to be filled up to the top with the bodies of women, hurled down to the depths of the pit of darkness, in order that the survivors might, at last, walk over in safety. Human bodies take but little room, and the abyss seemed to swallow them, as some greedy animal its prey. But Hadria knew, in her dream, that some day it would have claimed its last victim, and the surface would be level and solid, so that people could come and go, scarcely remembering that beneath their feet was once a chasm into which throbbing lives had to descend, to darkness and a living death. (451)

At the same time, the novel communicates that there *is* cause for optimism, because the chasm *will* be bridged. In addition to this feeling of desperation regarding the current state of society, *The Daughters of Danaus* also manages to express Caird's passionate belief in the individual's right to decide over his or her own life – and in his or her capacity for improvement.

[64] Ledger, *The New Woman*, 30.

5 'We Are Always Getting Away from the Present Moment': H. G. Wells and *The Time Machine*

What are we two, after all?
Two atoms of matter, breathing, living,
loving, suffering for one brief moment
on a planet which was once without organic life,
and which is slowly grinding on to irreparable decay
A few more drops in the ocean of eternity,
and we and our little loves
and little hates will be forgotten.
A few more drops, and mankind itself
will have disappeared, and once more a cold,
uninhabited globe will continue its
monotonous course round the sun.
No one can stop the coming of the 'Great Year.'
Nature – insolent, triumphant nature –
cares nothing for the individual.[1]

As one of the founders of the genre of science fiction,[2] it is perhaps not surprising that H. G. Wells had a background in science. According to Roslynn Haynes, 'it is scarcely possible to overestimate the extent to which [Wells's] scientific training changed and moulded his life and thought.'[3] A thorough understanding of evolutionary theory can be seen to have influenced most of this author's work, both the fiction and non-fiction. His science education seems to have made Wells particularly well suited to bridge the gap between scientists and lay people, something which he cared deeply about. In addition to numerous articles dealing with scientific matters, he took it upon himself to write a biology textbook, being unsatisfied with the ones he had read.[4] He did not care for what he saw as scientists' tendencies to either write down to people or else be unintelligible; according to him, it should be possible to teach science in a straightforward, non-condescending manner. This attitude stayed with him also when writing fiction: 'Not only did Wells gain popularity by exploiting world news, but his

[1] Ella Hepworth Dixon, *The Story of a Modern Woman* (1894; repr., LaVergne: Dodo Press, 2010), 149.
[2] See for example Stephen Gill, *Scientific Romances of H. G. Wells: A Critical Study* (Cornwall, ON: Vesta Publications, 1975), 25.
[3] Roslynn D. Haynes, *H. G. Wells: Discoverer of the Future: The Influence of Science on his Thought* (London: The Macmillan Press, 1980), 2.
[4] Haynes, *H. G. Wells: Discoverer of the Future*, 39.

work, in its time, also served a genuine function in educating a wide public to understand the contemporary news and its implications a little more intelligently.'[5]

In *The Time Machine* (1895), Wells takes determinism and retrogression to their natural extreme. 'I cannot convey the sense of abominable desolation that hung over the world,' the Time Traveller says when trying to describe his view of the world's end.[6] Rarely had the future been depicted so bleakly, according to Frank McConnell: 'Wells here is the chosen poet of the abyss, the perfect lyricist of entropy.'[7] This is a universe where there is no hope. Still, the text posits that we should live as if there were hope. Even if the earth might be dark and silent thirty million years from now, humans can at least work to make it habitable in the meantime.

The exaggerated versions of future humanity, the Eloi and the Morlocks, are described with just the right amount of satire to make the reader wonder whether they are to be taken seriously. The text hangs in an uncomfortable balance between satirising a number of elements of late-Victorian culture, thereby suggesting where contemporary society will end up if it does not change its ways, and the sense that no matter what humans try to do, the sun will still grow cold, and humanity will become extinct. In addition, the disconcerting relationship between the Time Traveller and Weena and the increasingly apparent similarities between the Time Traveller and the Morlocks indicate a text full of ambiguities where lines such as those between humans and animals, men and women, adults and children, now and then, and truth and prophecy are blurred to the point of translucency.

5.1 Wells's 'Assault on Human Self-Satisfaction'

H. G. Wells deliberately created the future of *The Time Machine* to counter the common conception of continual progress.[8] With his knowledge of biology, he found it exasperating to see evolutionary theory being popularised as a promise of ever newer and greater things for humanity. In both his fiction and his more journalistic work, Wells questioned this optimistic interpretation of evolution, and he was at pains to make his readers understand that progress was far from inevitable. As far as the scientific evidence went, 'progress' was only one of several directions evolution could take, and it was neither more nor less 'natural' than regression:

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[5] Haynes, *H. G. Wells: Discoverer of the Future*, 240.
[6] H. G. Wells, *The Time Machine* (1895; repr., London: Penguin Red Classics, 2007), 83. Further references will be in the text.
[7] Frank McConnell, *The Science Fiction of H. G. Wells* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), 86.
[8] Robert M. Philmus, 'The Logic of "Prophecy" in *The Time Machine*,' in *H. G. Wells: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Bernard Bergonzi (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1976), 56.

> These brief instances of degradation may perhaps suffice to show that there is a good deal to be found in the work of biologists quite inharmonious with such phrases as 'the progress of the ages,' and the 'march of mind.' The zoologist demonstrates that advance has been fitful and uncertain; rapid progress has often been followed by rapid extinction or degeneration, while, on the other hand, a form lowly and degraded has in its degradation often happened upon some fortunate discovery or valuable discipline and risen again, like a more fortunate Antaeos, to victory. There is, therefore, no guarantee in scientific knowledge of man's permanence or permanent ascendancy.[9]

The Time Traveller perfectly displays the attitude to which Wells is opposed. While homing in on a future moment in which to land, he eagerly assumes he will be met by something spectacular: 'What strange developments of humanity, what wonderful advances upon our rudimentary civilization, I thought, might not appear when I came to look nearly into the dim elusive world that raced and fluctuated before my eyes!' (20). His excitement is rewarded in Wellsian ironical fashion: the first thing the Time Traveller sets his eyes upon in the wonderful year of AD 802 701 is a dilapidated statue of a sphinx, 'greatly weatherworn, and that imparted an unpleasant suggestion of disease' (21). Uneasily, both he and the reader begin to suspect that in this future, something has gone badly wrong.

As well as being a symbol of the past, with its place in ancient myths and monuments, the sphinx is a poser of riddles. Its presence in *The Time Machine* is a clear signal that everything is not as it seems, and that the Time Traveller and the reader's task is to discover the truth. Uncovering the hidden secrets of nature had been a popular pastime both in literature and in real life during much of the nineteenth century. Widespread interest in subjects such as geology and archaeology had both professionals and amateurs out digging for clues that could further explain or enrich the shared knowledge about the far past of Earth and humanity.[10] Gillian Beer suggests that this interest is a possible explanation for the upsurge of the detective story in the later half of the nineteenth century.[11] In detective stories, clues were not disjointed or obscure; they meant something. Instead of trying to puzzle together a coherent narrative from insufficient or confusing fossil evidence, all the necessary evidence was there on the page in front of the reader, and from this evidence a tidy and satisfying conclusion could be deduced. In a time when theories about the distant past abounded, and the public had been taught to see that traces of history were everywhere, detective stories could

[9] H. G. Wells, 'Zoological Retrogression,' in *The Fin de Siècle: A Reader in Cultural History, c. 1880–1900*, ed. Sally Ledger and Roger Luckhurst (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 12.
[10] Gillian Beer, 'Origins and Oblivion in Victorian Narrative,' in *Sex, Politics, and Science in the Nineteenth-Century Novel: Selected Papers from the English Institute, 1983–84*, ed. Ruth Bernard Yeazell (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1986), 75.
[11] Beer, 'Origins and Oblivion,' 75.

give the reader 'a way of controlling the hermeneutic plethora.'[12] By making *The Time Machine* a mystery about the future, Wells both questions and pokes fun at this need for controlling the past. Just as he places 'the Golden Age' in the far future, at the sunset of mankind instead of at the dawn, as Bernard Bergonzi points out, the mystery of this novel looks forward instead of back.[13] The Time Traveller is part detective, part intrepid explorer, and has to investigate and discover the secrets of the future place where he has landed. The clues that he finds are (necessarily) from the past, but most of them are nevertheless still from his personal future. A somewhat reluctant investigator in the beginning, the Time Traveller eventually gives himself a lecture on how to survive in an unknown world: 'Face this world. Learn its ways, watch it, be careful of too hasty guesses at its meaning. In the end you will find clues to it all' (39). Trusting in his intelligence and capabilities of deduction, he assures himself that he will find answers. What he does not yet know is of course that the answers will turn out to be far from neat and satisfying; they will be devastating.

That the Time Traveller chooses to actively seek answers to the problems he encounters in the future instead of sinking into passivity shows the reader that there is some room for the characters to influence their fate after all, as Roslynn Haynes points out.[14] Natural science, with the discovery of evolution and the Second Law of Thermodynamics, was sometimes criticised for being deterministic. It seemed to leave humanity without any meaningful possibility of choice.[15] If the end was determined anyhow, what could people do? What room was left for them to decide over their own lives? *The Time Machine* presents a number of different perspectives on this. The Time Traveller, on the one hand, gives his eyewitness account about Earth's fading into darkness, thus impressing upon the reader the utter futility of hoping for the best: any progress humankind makes will be cancelled out by the death of the sun. The narrator, on the other hand, insists that 'it remains for us to live as though it were not so' (91) and takes comfort in the thought that some remnant of humanity will remain, at least for a very long time. In the words of Frank McConnell, '[t]he two voices of *The Time Machine* … encapsulate between them that elementary tension between cosmic determinism and freedom of the will that we have seen at the heart of all speculation about the future of mankind.'[16] The Time Traveller's actions give lie to the idea that personal choice does not matter. They rather determine the difference between life and death for him (as well

[12] Beer, 'Origins and Oblivion,' 75.
[13] Bernard Bergonzi, '*The Time Machine*: An Ironic Myth,' in *H. G. Wells: A Collection of Critical Essays*, 45.
[14] Haynes, *H. G. Wells: Discoverer of the Future*, 129.
[15] Haynes, *H. G. Wells: Discoverer of the Future*, 127.
[16] McConnell, *The Science Fiction of H. G. Wells*, 88.

as for Weena and assorted Morlocks). The choices you make in your daily life might not necessarily affect the cosmos, the novel suggests, but they *do* make a difference to yourself and the people around you.

One reason Wells had for trying to shake his readers out of their complacency was that as long as they thought humanity would improve on its own, they would not bother to investigate what they might do to help things along. 'All things are integral, but it has been left for men to be consciously integral, to take, at last, a share in the process,' Wells writes.[17] In his view, the biological evolution of humanity works so slowly that it is impossible to measure or predict. Culture, however, can be changed in a matter of generations.[18] The darkness at the end of time 'marks the complete dominance of a purely physical nature in which human intelligence and choice have no place. Total darkness marks the limit of human imagination, the point at which pure, inevitable natural process rules.'[19] The splitting of humanity into Eloi and Morlocks is something which it is possible to work against, however. 'I, for my own part, cannot think that these latter days of weak experiment, fragmentary theory and mutual discord are indeed man's culminating time' (91), says the narrator of *The Time Machine*. The novel functions as a mystery and as satire, as a warning and as a wake-up call. It is also a call to action, in the hope of affecting change. If the days of the narrator are not to be 'man's culminating time,' then humanity has to prevent itself from leaning more and more in the direction of one or the other of the two extremes – one passive and decorative, the other bestial and brutal.

5.2 Childlike Eloi

One of the first things the Time Traveller sees in the year 802 701, as noted above, is an image of decay. The vision gives him an uncomfortable feeling and sends his speculations about future humanity in an altogether new direction:

> What might not have happened to men? What if cruelty had grown into a common passion? What if in this interval the race had lost its manliness, and had developed into something inhuman, unsympathetic, and overwhelmingly powerful? I might seem some old-world savage animal, only the more dreadful and disgusting for our common likeness – a foul creation to be incontinently slain. (22)

[17] H. G. Wells, *Anticipations of the Reaction of Mechanical and Scientific Progress upon Human Life and Thought* (1901; repr., Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 1999), 164.
[18] Richard Pearson, 'Primitive Modernity: H. G. Wells and the Prehistoric Man of the 1890s,' *The Yearbook of English Studies* 37, no. 1 (2007): 65.
[19] John Huntington, *The Logic of Fantasy: H. G. Wells and Science Fiction* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 80.

As it turns out, the Time Traveller will face the truth of each of these suppositions, though not perhaps in ways he could have imagined beforehand.

From entertaining high hopes of future civilisation, the Time Traveller is soon forced to face reality. The Eloi, the first people that he meets, are so far from what he has pictured people of the future to be that he nearly throws a tantrum. '[W]ere these people fools?' he scornfully asks himself the moment they fail to perform to his nineteenth-century standard (25). He is bitterly disappointed when he realises that they think he has travelled to them from the sun. This does not stop him from confirming their hypothesis, however, in a patronising way eerily reminiscent of all the times some white man has claimed to be sent from the gods. In the space of his first encounter with the Eloi, the Time Traveller abandons his worries about any future super-humans to whom he would hardly compare. Condescendingly describing these people of the future as childlike, he immediately decides that he, as an educated Victorian, is far superior to them. As Kelly Hurley points out,

> the Eloi are in many ways an embodiment of the worst fears of the degenerationists … The Eloi display all those characteristics said to typify savages, women, and children: egoism, simplicity, a love of self-adornment, indolence, short attention span, lack of intellectual curiosity, imitativeness, and inability to think abstractly or creatively.[20]

This is truly the place where degeneration theory is taken to its logical conclusion. The Time Traveller explains the Eloi's lack of intelligence in there being no use for it and thinks that life has become so easy that intelligence would actually be a drawback. For a Victorian scientist who places intelligence above all virtues, this is a somewhat bitter pill to swallow. The Time Traveller observes that contrary to the common idea of progress as growth in the intellectual, economical, or imperial sense, humanity has progressed in its own fashion. It is perfectly adapted to its environment, but by being so, it has also become more vulnerable: 'When a species overadapts to its environment, it starts to die: that is a central Darwinian tenet, and is very near the heart of *The Time Machine*. For the environment will inevitably change over the course of geological, cosmological time.'[21] Through overadapting themselves to this (relatively) peaceful world, the Eloi have lost what competitive edge they once had. They are unable to stand up to the Morlocks, and they will also be unable to handle environmental change such as the climate growing colder, because they do not have the imagination to understand what would be needed, such as houses or fire. They have lost the flexibility that is necessary for a species if it is to survive over time.

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[20] Kelly Hurley, *The Gothic Body: Sexuality, Materialism, and Degeneration at the Fin de Siècle* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 83.
[21] McConnell, *The Science Fiction of H. G. Wells*, 77.

The Eloi's lack of secondary sexual characteristics strengthens the Time Traveller's perception of them as childlike. He claims not to be able to see the difference between male and female Eloi – 'these people of the future were alike' (29) – yet he calls them 'he' or 'she,' and he conveniently decides that Weena, to whom he becomes attached, is female. As mentioned, the Eloi's characteristics would denote 'female' in mainstream Victorian culture, and precisely this general lapse into femininity is a sign of degeneration. In a period when activity, decisiveness, and intelligence were read as male, while passivity, weakness, and uncertainty were seen as female, femininity might be construed as threatening: 'Effeminacy, indeed, was the main obstacle against human progress.'[22] It seems that the Time Traveller's worry about humanity's losing its manliness has come to pass. As several critics point out, the Eloi are in part a caricature of the late-Victorian aesthetes, who are here held up as one extreme which humanity risks falling into if they keep up their present modes of living.[23] Relishing their decadent languor and living purely through the senses, humans have finally become incapable of critical or inventive thought. 'I never met people more indolent or more easily fatigued,' the Time Traveller exclaims (28), and later he grieves 'to think how brief the dream of the human intellect had been. It had committed suicide' (78).

The Time Traveller's relationship with Weena serves to give the Eloi a (human) face and to make the reader more interested in trying to figure out what the Eloi really are. Bergonzi claims the relationship is 'totally unconvincing, and tends to embarrass the reader.'[24] It is perhaps not so much unconvincing as it is troubling, however. In light of earlier remarks about Victorian womanliness, Weena might actually be seen as the essence of Victorian femininity. The things the Time Traveller calls her, e.g. 'my little woman' (42) or 'the little doll of a creature' (43), are in perfect keeping with common endearments of the period, and even his frustration at her clinging to him seems familiar in a culture where women are not supposed to take interest in anything besides marrying and creating a family (and therefore risk becoming as much a burden as a comfort to their husbands, because they have nothing else but him and the children on which to focus), and where a notion of chivalry is still in place. Weena's drifting between 'child' and 'woman' is also familiar within this context. To the Time Traveller, she *is* a woman, but he consistently describes her as a child: 'She was exactly like a child' (42) and 'The creature's friendliness affected me exactly as a child's might have done' (42). Bram Dijkstra describes how tendencies in late-Victorian art

[22] Bram Dijkstra, *Idols of Perversity: Fantasies of Feminine Evil in Fin-de-Siècle Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 220.
[23] See for example Bergonzi, 'An Ironic Myth,' 46.
[24] Bergonzi, 'An Ironic Myth,' 46.

reflect a longing in the (mostly) male artists towards innocence and uncomplicated relationships.[25] Many of them looked to childhood for the answer, and idealised images and stories about childhood were popular, such as Lewis Carroll's books about Alice or Carl Larsson's paintings of children. There was a very real danger of blurring or crossing the lines, however. Women had long been thought to be like children, and their circumstances may in certain ways be said to have made them so; they did not have access to education or the possibility of earning their own money and were often completely dependent on the men in their lives. When it became more common for women to demand a say over their own lives, some men found this very distressing and turned to children and childhood for relief: 'The helplessness, weakness, and passive pliability of ignorance he could no longer find in woman he began to attribute to the child.'[26] Read along these lines, Weena is a perfect woman *because* she is (like) a child.

Weena and the Time Traveller's different attitudes towards each other thus reflect the different conditioning of Victorian men and women. The Time Traveller has a whole world of interesting things to explore and discover, but Weena, once she has met the Time Traveller, only has eyes for him: 'But the problems of the world had to be mastered. I had not, I said to myself, come into the future to carry on a miniature flirtation. … I think, altogether, I had as much trouble as comfort from her devotion' (43). It is interesting that when the Time Traveller muses upon the Eloi looking alike, he supposes that there is no need for differences in gender roles, and therefore no need for differences between the sexes either, in a society where everything is perfect. He does not necessarily see this as a good thing, however. 'We see some beginnings of this even in our own time,' he notes (30), leaving the reader with the suspicion that if society does not enforce strict gender roles, the Eloi are the inevitable outcome. The gender equality that has developed naturally among the Eloi is actually a sign of degeneration as far as the Time Traveller is concerned.

John Huntington suggests that the unease created in the reader by the relationship between the Time Traveller and Weena is intended, and that it has its basis in the question of how human Weena really is.[27] There is always the feeling that she is more of a pet than a friend or a girlfriend; she 'always seemed to [the Time Traveller] … more human than she was, perhaps because her affection was so human' (64). It does not take long after the Time Traveller is back in his own time before he starts to forget her: 'Now, in this old familiar

[25] Dijkstra, *Idols of Perversity*, 188.
[26] Dijkstra, *Idols of Perversity*, 195.
[27] Huntington, *The Logic of Fantasy*, 44.

room, it is more like the sorrow of a dream than an actual loss' (77). While Weena is still alive, the Time Traveller states his intention to bring her back with him (63), but the reader is not told why. Is it because he is in love with her? Because he wants to rescue her? Or because he wants to study her? Would he have displayed Weena to his dinner companions (and, by extension, to his colleagues, the press, and from there, the whole of society) in the manner of his throwing two white flowers upon the table, as indisputable proof of his time travels, ready for them to examine? The reader is supposed to sympathise with Weena because of her good qualities, but the questions of how human she is and how the Time Traveller really feels towards her are left open, increasing the reader's discomfort with the relationship.

5.3 Bestial Morlocks

The Time Traveller's attitude towards the Eloi is perhaps best described as curiosity tinged with disappointment. His reactions upon meeting the Morlocks, however, are quite different. Seeing a Morlock climb down a pipe makes him shudder because '[i]t was so like a human spider!' (46). Consistently comparing the Morlocks to animals, the Time Traveller tries to distance himself from them, but has (bitterly!) to admit to himself after a close look that 'this bleached, obscene, nocturnal Thing, which had flashed before me, was also heir to all the ages' (46). The Eloi are in truth 'humanity upon the wane' (31); as a people who in selecting against abilities such as intelligence and strength eventually have lost these for ever, they deserve only pity. They are in decline, but until the Time Traveller discloses their actual position regarding the Morlocks, it is a sweet, idyllic decline; as Bergonzi points out, it is a pastoral – of sorts.[28] The Morlocks, however, are perceived as not so much humans in decline as beasts on the way up: 'there was an altogether new element in the sickening quality of the Morlocks – a something inhuman and malign. Instinctively I loathed them' (57).

As Huntington notes, *The Time Machine* engages the reader in trying to puzzle out how human or how animal these descendants of humanity really are. Because of the Time Traveller's sympathy towards the Eloi and because of the physical appearance of the two peoples, 'the Eloi seem subhumans, the Morlocks superanimals.'[29] The Time Traveller's revulsion towards the Morlocks is precisely because of their animalistic characteristics; instead of gently having adapted itself to paradise, this branch of humanity has apparently regressed back to a pre-human, animal state. Cesare Lombroso argued that atavism could be detected by physical characteristics, and he urged his readers to perform a long list of

[28] Bergonzi, 'An Ironic Myth,' 52.
[29] Huntington, *The Logic of Fantasy*, 43.

measurements on themselves and their loved ones to see if anything was amiss.[30] The measurements were not always needed, however, because 'the most reliable gauges of atavism, startlingly enough, were bodily symptoms, much like the interwoven symptoms of metaphysical estrangement, uncanniness, abjection, and nausea I have described.'[31] The reason why Lombroso thought it important to be aware of the atavistic elements in the populace was that in his opinion, atavism was linked to criminality. Persons with atavistic features supposedly lacked the ability to reign in and control their animal instincts, making them dangerous citizens of the modern, civilised world. As atavism could crop up anywhere, in anyone, one could never really be safe. Civilisation was threatened at its core. Leila May's remark on the fear generated by the blurring of boundaries in *Dracula* is valid here as well: 'It is a *peur de soi*, a dread of itself, a dread that the assumptions of stability on which society was based were illusory, that the germ of contamination was endemic and would spread and that those fighting against the disease would themselves become diseased.'[32] The instinctive recoil in the presence of atavism was a form of protection, a sign not to engage. The Time Traveller's reflexive disgust reveals the Morlocks' atavistic (and therefore probably 'criminal' in some way) nature to the reader.

The Time Traveller wants to feel related to the Eloi, but shows himself to be much closer to the Morlocks in many ways.[33] The Eloi are a friendly, good-natured people, while the Time Traveller has to suppress his desire to hurt somebody every time things do not go according to his wishes. When the Time Machine is gone, for instance, he has 'the hardest task in the world to keep [his] hands off [the Eloi's] pretty laughing faces' (37). He casually threatens the Eloi on several occasions and tosses them around whenever they are in his way. In the case of the Morlocks, he even seems to take pleasure in the thought of violence for its own sake: 'And I longed very much to kill a Morlock or so. Very inhuman, you may think, to want to kill one's own descendants! But it was impossible, somehow, to feel any humanity in the things' (67). One would suppose that he would not experience this level of bloodlust in the presence of actual animals. It is because he desperately wants to mark himself as different from them, to reduce them to the animals they remind him of, that he longs to smash their skulls. But the only thing a violent conquest of the Morlocks would prove would be their common animality. The Time Traveller's fear that he 'might seem some old-world savage

[30] Hurley, *The Gothic Body*, 100.
[31] Hurley, *The Gothic Body*, 101.
[32] Leila S. May, '"Foul Things of the Night": Dread in the Victorian Body,' *The Modern Language Review* 93, no. 1 (1998): 21.
[33] Hurley, *The Gothic Body*, 86.

animal, only the more dreadful and disgusting for our common likeness' (22) to the people of the future turns out to come true, as well as perfectly capturing his perception of the Morlocks.

As in *Dracula*, characters in *The Time Machine* are being devoured by monsters in the dark. The terror is also intensified by the close relationship between hunter and prey, or herder and herd, as is perhaps a more accurate description of the Morlocks and the Eloi. The tension is built up through a nagging suspicion that eventually proves itself to be right. To the Time Traveller, the Morlocks' cannibalism is the definite proof of their bestiality, of their difference from him. At the same time, echoing Mona Caird, he has to admit that society's 'prejudice against human flesh is no deep-seated instinct' (62). He understands that this is a cultural demand, something that is taught – and thus something that might change. In fact, there were people in late-Victorian society who demanded a change which meant not eating flesh at all. The reasoning that made the antivivisectionists oppose vivisection also informed a growing number of vegetarians.[34] If humans descended from animals, would not eating meat, any kind of meat, be dangerously close to cannibalism? The Time Traveller hurriedly tries to establish a difference between himself and the Morlocks, to avoid any suspicion that they are even remotely the same. But, as Michael Parrish Lee notes, 'more than creating distance and difference between contemporary "civilized" culture and its cannibalistic ancestors and descendents, the Traveller's comment rather stresses the utter contingency and instability of the "civilized" non-cannibalistic diet.'[35] That the Time Traveller's society considers 'good wholesome meat' (87) acceptable human food is purely a cultural convention. He might have lived among people such as the Eloi, who do not eat meat at all, or among the likenesses of Morlocks, eating a different sort of meat altogether – if it really is that different.

5.4 'The Gravities of Terrestrial Life'

The Time Traveller habitually makes sweeping judgements about the world to which he has travelled. In the case of the Eloi, he has to reinterpret their situation several times after receiving new information. Each time he chastises himself for having been short-sighted before. Oddly enough he does not really modify his other statements in this way, perhaps because they are never directly disproven. He claims to have learnt things about this future world from his time there, but most of what he has learnt must have been from observation and experience, because the Eloi's simple language and lack of abstract reasoning would have

[34] Michael Parrish Lee, 'Reading Meat in H. G. Wells,' *Studies in the Novel* 42, no. 3 (2010): 251.
[35] Lee, 'Reading Meat in H. G. Wells,' 260.

made them unable to tell him anything other than what they believed to be true about their immediate surroundings. The Time Traveller registers that he does not see any weeds and deduces that they are extinct (31). The same goes for animals (27). Thinking back to his view of the Thames from a hilltop, he muses that '[t]here were no hedges, no signs of proprietary rights, no evidences of agriculture; the whole earth had become a garden' (30). But he does not see all over the earth; during the whole of his stay in the future, he never ventures outside present-day London. The humanity he sees as being 'on the wane' (31) might in theory have different offshoots in other parts of the world. The Time Traveller, like *The Time Machine* itself, is 'in thrall to the compelling vision of human entropy, much like degeneration theory.'[36] His mode of reasoning is exemplarily scientific in that he proposes hypotheses to himself and then modifies them according to the evidence he manages to uncover, but his hypotheses have a rather large bias when he equals London – or England, even – with 'the whole earth.' That he immediately supposes both the Eloi and the Morlocks to be devolved humans instead of the results of some other animals' evolution, testifies to his anthropocentric vision. In his other writings, however, Wells stresses the point that humanity should not feel too sure of its supposed superiority:

> Still, so far as any scientist can tell us, it may be that, instead of this, Nature is, in unsuspected obscurity, equipping some now humble creature with wider possibilities of appetite, endurance, or destruction, to rise in the fullness of time and sweep *homo* away into the darkness from which his universe arose. The Coming Beast must certainly be reckoned in any anticipatory calculations regarding the Coming Man.[37]

In the end it does not matter, of course. With the death of the sun, all recognisable forms of humanity are necessarily gone from Earth. Because Wells is determined in this novel to disabuse his contemporaries of the notion of evolution as progress only, he does not let the Time Traveller entertain the possibility that 'advanced' versions of humanity may exist elsewhere on Earth – or on other planets, for that matter: 'Beyond these lifeless sounds the world was silent. Silent? It would be hard to convey the stillness of it. All the sounds of man, the bleating of sheep, the cries of birds, the hum of insects, the stir that makes the background of our lives – all that was over' (85). And yet he wants the readers 'to live as though it were not so' (91). To become disillusioned or frightened into passivity would be as destructive for humanity as the docile abandonment of initiative we have been able to witness in the Eloi.

[36] Hurley, *The Gothic Body*, 81.
[37] Wells, 'Zoological Retrogression,' 12.

6 Conclusion

Ah, love, let us be true
To one another! for the world, which seems
To lie before us like a land of dreams,
So various, so beautiful, so new,
Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light,
Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain;
And we are here as on a darkling plain
Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight,
Where ignorant armies clash by night.[1]

The themes of evolution, degeneration, and determinism that I set out to explore have been given considerable place in all the four novels of this thesis. In *Tess of the D'Urbervilles,* heredity and determinism are continually questioned through Tess's insistence on her own power to choose. That she is ultimately unsuccessful would seem to negate her agency, but the fact that she is shown to be 'more sinned against than sinning' (232) suggests that her fate would have been quite different if society – or even just one man, Angel – had treated her differently. *Dracula* displaces degeneracy onto a monster who threatens to spread the affliction among the English people. In an impressive display of bravery and tactics, however, the heroes manage to rid the world of this danger – at least as far as we can tell. In *The Daughters of Danaus,* biological terms such as evolution or heredity are explicitly appropriated in a cultural context.[2] If society does not make an effort to change, humanity is doomed, Mona Caird suggests, because it cannot in the long run sustain the subjection of one half of its members. Her view of humanity is both dim and optimistic at the same time – most humans are not particularly moral or idealistic in Caird's opinion; they just do what they are used to and that of which society approves. Such a perspective also means, however, that if one can get enough people to wish for change, the rest will follow. The ones who have 'gone before' and supposedly failed in bringing about change, such as Hadria, should not be cause for dejection but for encouragement to further action. In *The Time Machine,* we meet humanity on the other side of a safe and prosperous age. The argument is that active traits such as curiosity, courage, and decision are only useful in times of challenge, and when the challenge disappears, so do these character traits. The future of the Eloi and the Morlocks acts

[1]Matthew Arnold, 'Dover Beach,' 1867; repr. in *Victorian Poetry: An Annotated Anthology*, edited by Francis O'Gorman (Oxford: Blackwell, 2010), 313.
[2] Angelique Richardson, '"People Talk a Lot of Nonsense about Heredity": Mona Caird and Anti-Eugenic Feminism,' in *Fin-de-Siècle Feminisms*, 200.

as a warning to the novel's readers not to become too complacent in their comfortable, modern lives. Humanity might still take a downwards turn.

One particular image occurs in all the four novels that I have studied: the image of the sleeping or swooning woman. Tess seems to make a habit out of losing power over herself in critical moments, such as when she falls asleep (or is drugged) right before Alec rapes her. Lucy walks in her sleep, and we have already seen how that makes her vulnerable to attack as well as suggesting flaws in her character. Mina is first drugged by Dracula's evil powers and then hypnotised by Van Helsing. Hadria feels herself as in a trance at a party and is unable to resist Hubert's advances, thus setting the seal on her entire future. Weena faints so that the Time Traveller has to carry her, and she disappears from the narrative (and is presumed dead) while they are asleep. As we can see, at the most important points in these characters lives, when something dramatic is about to happen to them, they are asleep or otherwise under an influence of one kind or another. Why do they need to be asleep when things happen – or *for* things to happen? Bram Dijkstra suggests that the image of the sleeping or sick (or even dead) woman was popular in contemporary art because it made her vulnerable and unable to resist the gaze of the male viewer.[3] From the things that happen to the women in these novels when they are not fully awake, it is clear that they do become vulnerable. It could perhaps be said that their falling asleep is thus just a way for the authors to move the plot forward, because it creates an opening of which evil can take advantage. Such a reading does not fully explain the extensive use of the trope, however, and it seems to have slightly different connotations in each novel. When Hardy chose to remove Alec's druggist's bottle in later editions of *Tess*, it was, as we have seen, in order to make the rape/seduction scene more ambiguous. For Tess to be completely immobilised by a drug would also be to absolve her of accountability, and Hardy did not want that. He wanted a situation where the reader would never be able to tell what had actually happened, so that the discussion of the meaning of 'pure' could take place. In *Dracula*, Lucy makes herself vulnerable by roaming the streets in her sleep, but at the same time she is deemed innocent by the other characters precisely because she is asleep while she does it.[4] Sleeping becomes both an invitation and a defence.

[3] Bram Dijkstra, *Idols of Perversity: Fantasies of Feminine Evil in Fin-de-Siècle Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 62–63.

[4] I do not for one second suggest that Lucy or the other characters are somehow responsible for their violation by sleeping in the wrong place or wearing too little clothing, because that would be to lay the blame on the wrong characters. Such a line of thought can, however, be detected within these texts, and it was part of the cultural narrative at the time. Mina, for example, is desperate to get her and Lucy home as quickly as possible when Lucy is sleepwalking, because their reputation would be ruined if someone were to see them walking the streets in the middle of the night wearing nightclothes (103). Angel's blaming Tess for her 'want of firmness' has already been noted.

The condition of being only half-awake could also be said to be a representation of women's actual status in Victorian society. We have seen how women at the time were encouraged to cultivate a docile, passive manner and how they often did not have the power to make important decisions whether it was over their own lives or the lives of their families. It might be said that the women in this position were all living their lives half asleep because they were discouraged from exercising or developing their natural abilities. Mina, for example, who dazzles everyone around her with her 'male' brain, is in the end seen to be most useful to the group when she is under hypnosis. It fits in with the general movement in the text towards 'putting her back in her place' that she should, on occasion, be made to submit the authority over her mind to someone else.

Another trope that reoccurs is the importance of blood or flesh. Tess's D'Urberville blood may or may not be partly responsible for her fate. Images of blood appear throughout the novel to really fix the possibility in the reader's mind. The focus on blood in *Dracula* is perhaps not surprising to anyone, but it does not stop with the vampires. Lucy has to have several blood transfusions, and Renfield eats insects and birds to consume the power he perceives as inherent in their blood. Caird's Professor Fortescue disapproves of eating animal flesh, reminding us of the vegetarians at the time (and later) who linked eating animals to cannibalism. Cannibalism is precisely one of the main themes in *The Time Machine*, where the Time Traveller is disgusted to realise that future humanity is in essence devouring itself. At the same time, the first thing he asks for when he returns from the future is meat. The vampire women in *Dracula* eat children, and Caird uses the dining on human (children's) flesh to illustrate what people will do if they think it respectable.

Blood acquired an obvious importance in both heredity and degeneration theory. In these novels, we see blood presented as the carrier of both hereditary weakness (*Tess*) and disease (*Dracula*). The idea of cannibalism reached for by several of the authors was especially threatening to the late Victorians because it blurred the boundaries between humans and animals and made the humans see the animals inside themselves. It reminded them that a state of nature was never far away. The eating of babies' flesh might also symbolise a destruction of the race's future, where a more immediate threat is presented instead of the slow waiting for degeneration to bring humankind backwards.

The different writers approach many of the same scientific narratives and common cultural symbols and use them for their own ends. Hardy creates a universe heavily affected by evolution, deep time, and entropy as a backdrop for and contrast to the everyday lives of his characters with all their experiences of sorrow and happiness. Stoker uses degeneration

theory to create a monster and modern technology to get rid of it. Here, the most important thing is to scare and unsettle the reader, and images of degeneration certainly assist in this task. Both Caird and Wells are politically motivated in writing their novels, but Caird more so than Wells, at least when it comes to the two works in question here. Caird explicitly asks for society to wake up and take action, while the suggestion in Wells's novel is still just that – a suggestion.

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